

The
MADONNA
of the CURB

ANNA BALMER MYERS

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Front



THE MADONNA OF THE CURB

The Madonna of the Curb

By

ANNA BALMER MYERS

Author of "Patchwork," and "Amanda"

ILLUSTRATED BY

HELEN MASON GROSE



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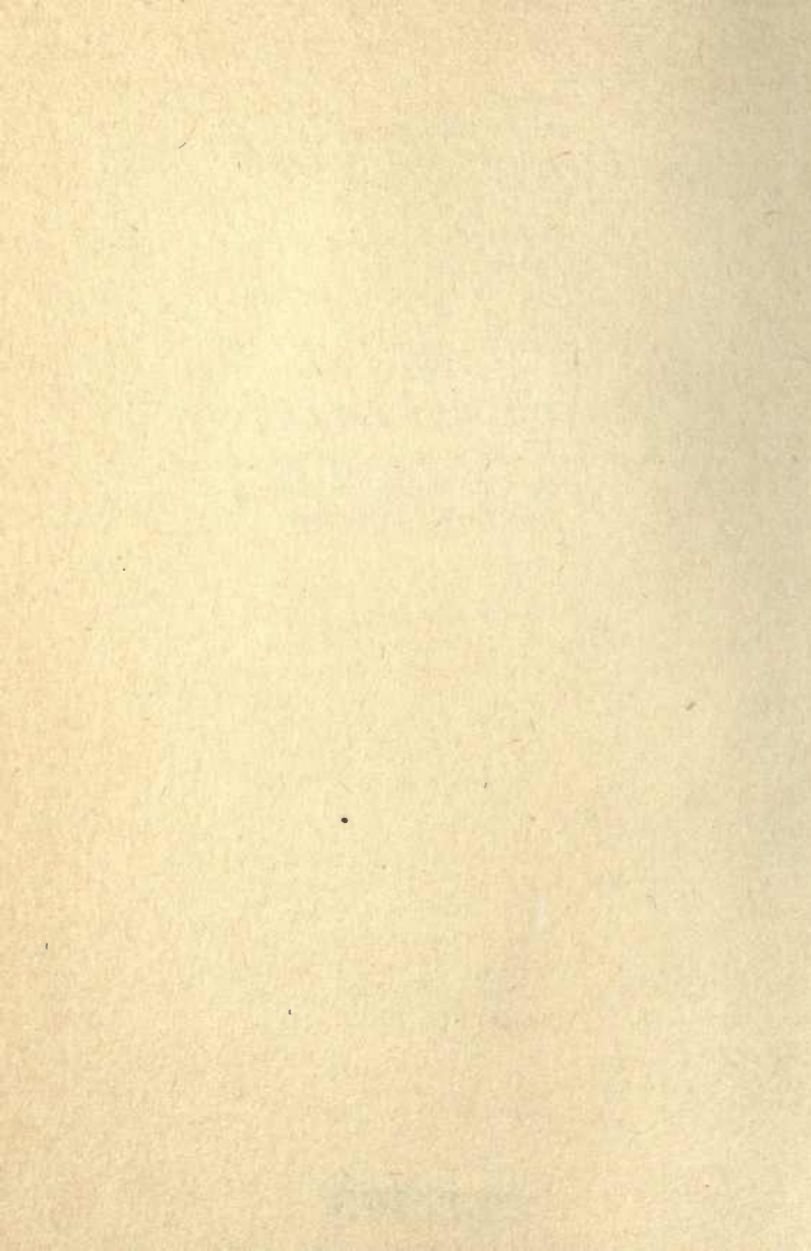
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To

ANNA VERONICA FARRINGTON

*in memory of the days when we worked
together on Sunset Mountain
this book is dedicated*

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THE MADONNA OF THE CURB

On the curb of a city pavement,
By the ash and garbage cans,
In the stench and rolling thunder
Of motor trucks and vans,
There sits my little lady,
With brave but troubled eyes,
And in her arms a baby
That cries and cries and cries.

She cannot be more than seven;
But years go fast in the slums,
And hard on the pains of winter
The pitiless summer comes.
The wail of sickly children
She knows; she understands
The pangs of puny bodies,
The clutch of small hot hands,

In the deadly blaze of August,
That turns men faint and mad,
She quiets the peevish urchins
By telling a dream she had—
A heaven with marble counters,
And ice, and a singing fan;
And a God in white, so friendly,
Just like the drug-store man.

Her ragged dress is dearer
Than the perfect robe of a queen!
Poor little lass, who knows not
The blessing of being clean.
And when you are giving millions
To Belgian, Pole and Serb,
Remember my pitiful lady—
Madonna of the Curb!

—CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

(The Author acknowledges with thanks permission from Mr. Morley and George Doran & Co. to print this poem.)

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"I won't press mine," she said gaily .	<i>Facing page 256</i>
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The Madonna of the Curb

CHAPTER I

RED ROSE COURT

PERHAPS when the great manufacturing city of New Jersey in which Red Rose Court was located was in its infancy, before the tide of business and the spreading factories had swallowed gardens and lawns; perchance then, many years ago, there stood two or three cottages, where in the early summer red roses climbed about the porches or twined their rambling branches along old fences, and gave to the street its perfume-suggesting name. But upon the summer day of this story, Red Rose Court was as dirty, crowded and ill-smelling a habitation of human creatures as exists under God's blue sky.

Upon each side of the narrow street was a row of dingy houses, beyond and against which tall factories and tenements were built so closely that they formed a rectangle about the place, leaving only one exit from the Court.

This miserable exit, formed by a six-foot archway between two buildings, opened to a busy thoroughfare where cars and trucks sped on their noisy way. In and out through this alleyway passed those who lived in the dozen houses of Red Rose Court.

The structures were tumble-down, unsightly, unsanitary hovels. Shutters hung upon one hinge, broken panes of window glass were replaced by dirty rags. The

cobble-paved street was littered with a collection of boxes, broken furniture, ash cans and garbage pails, the latter spilling their malodorous contents, while from the narrow gutter along one side a stream of nauseous gray water spread, overflowing, and added its horror of damp putridness to the foul stench that vitiated the air in all directions.

On the side of the street where the shadows afforded a slight relief from the intense heat a number of children played. Like the houses they were filthy and ill-kept. The oldest, a girl of eleven, sat on the curb and held in her arms a baby, puny, whining and unmistakably ill. The girl's face bent anxiously over the fretting child, which she cradled more comfortably in her arm.

"Poor kid," the little mother murmured as she rocked back and forth on the curb and crooned tenderly, "Poor kid! It's darned tough on youse young ones in Red Rose Court. Now if it was nice as the name sounds you'd be next thing to heaven, but Red Rose Court is the very hell of a hot hole on a day like this, ain't it, though! Poor kid, now you shut up your cryin' and Sade'll fix a fan to make you cool. Here, you Jakey, gimme that there rag," she shouted to one of the small boys who was rigging a sailboat from an old shoe and a dirty rag.

"Ach, Sade, I wants ——"

"D'you always get what you wants, eh? You heard what I said—gimme that rag."

She accompanied the words with a wild shake of her head, a shake apparently suggestive of efficient punishment waiting for him if he dared disobey. The boy, visibly intimidated, came nearer and held out the coveted rag.

"Pig of a Dutchman!" she said as she snatched the

object from his hands and turned to wave it before the face of the gasping babe. Then she dipped the cloth into the dirty water of the gutter and wiped the hot cheeks and forehead of the baby.

"There, ain't that the ticket?" she said tenderly. "Bet your life Sade can make you cool."

A feeble laugh from the sick child brought a loud one from the little protectress as she lifted the baby to a new position on her lap. She began to speak to it as though it were old enough to grasp the meaning of her words. "You little angel, if you was mine I'd take you to the country, I'd take all youse little kids o' Red Rose Court, but 'specially you—out to the country where the green grass is growin' and wonderin' why there ain't no babies to roll on it, and where the birds sing you to sleep, and you could splash in a little brook like we read about in school, with ferns and pebbles and forget-me-nots on the banks, and where you could paddle your feet in water that looks like silver. Then I'd put you in a bed all white and cool, like them I see in the store windows, or like them they had in the horspital I was to with your ma that time your pa got hurt in the accident. And I'd have ice in the room to keep it cool, and butterflies wavin' round and fannin' you, and I'd have cold milk and ice-cream for you—go on with youse, I was talkin' to the baby," she exclaimed to the other children who had drawn around her as her fancy painted the heaven she'd make for the baby if she could.

"Ah, Sade, have a heart," spoke up a girl scarcely seven, yet old beyond her years in the language of the slums. "We're a darned sight hotter'n that kid! Give her back to old lady Maloney, and take us to the park for a walk."

"Yeh, do, Sade," shouted the others and swarmed around the girl on the curb. Sade looked down into the hot face of the baby. "Ain't youse got no feelin's? Don't you know her ma is workin' this week? I promised Mrs. Maloney I'd keep the kid. Shut up," she said as the baby gave a pitiable little wail, "did you think Sade'd go off and leave you in this hot hole?" Her words were rough but her voice was as tender as motherhood itself. "Poor kid, it's a tough deal they're handin' you. But it'll be cool again some day, and while it's hot, believe me, Sade's goin' to make you comfortable. Leave it to Sade! Come on, everybody that wants to go to the park, we'll get the coach and take the baby."

A shout greeted her words; the play in the dirty water was willingly left at the prospect of a visit to the park.

One of the boys ran for the coach and the girl stood up. She looked like a miserable, forlorn, but devoted Madonna, in that dirty, notorious alley, ironically called Red Rose Court.

Her full name was Sarah Burkhart, but the only place she ever heard that version of it was at school. To her father, stepmother and the people of Red Rose Court she was Sade.

Her eleven years had brought her much premature knowledge of the world and its wickedness. Sordidness and squalor, with all their loathsome progeny, formed her environment, and yet, was there not a possibility that the same Nature that roots a lily in the mud and fashions a pearl in a slimy bivalve might accomplish a like transformation for that child of the slums? Such a suggestion would have been met by Sade with a sneering laugh, and a disdainful answer, "Me grow like a lily? Hot air! Nothin' doin'!" For she had long since learned to face

the truth without squirming and knew she was homely. The cracked mirror in her home had shown her how appropriate was the appellation her stepmother frequently hurled at her, "You ugly brat."

She *was* far from beautiful; her cheeks were too thin, her mouth too large, her black hair habitually unkempt. The only thing that redeemed her face from positive ugliness was a pair of big gray eyes. They were lovely and expressive when wide open, but she had a way of half veiling them with her lashes, as though she were peering into the very soul of things and people. It gave her a shrewd, unlovely expression but added emphasis to her dictates at such times when she chose to rule the other children of the Court.

After the rickety coach was bumped over the cobblestones and into the street outside the archway Sarah laid the baby on its worn cushions. "There now, off we go. You're the only one's got an autermobile. You should worry how far it is to the park! Sh," she shook her tousled head as the child began to cry, "don't you cry when you're off to heaven. All aboard!" She wheeled the carriage a few feet then stood still and faced one of the little boys. "You, Jakey Schlotzberger, I got a big notion to leave you home this time. Yesterday when I took you past the candy factory you bawled 'cause you couldn't have none."

"Ach, I won't cry this time," half wailed Jakey. "I won't bawl at all, no matter what it happens, Sade, if you just takes me with."

"Well," she relented, "I'll try you once more, but if you cry this time you'll never go again till roses bloom in Red Rose Court. Come on, kids. But mind, it's hot, it's awful hot to walk."

"We don't care," they assured her; and the little party started off. In some sections of the city their departure would have attracted attention, but in that thickly populated neighborhood no one took notice of the pleasure seekers.

"Which park we goin' at?" asked one.

"Might as well go to North Brook; that's the best."

"Hooray, you're bully, Sade!" the chorus of happy voices and squeals of delight greeted her announcement.

"Aw, cut the noise and come on," she ordered.

Through the noisy business section the girl led her party until they entered at length upon a long street lined with great brownstone houses.

"Gee, it's quiet here," exclaimed Jakey. "Who lives in them big houses?"

"Rich guys."

"Where does they get all their money?"

"Make it. But shut up, you talk too much."

"Make it?" repeated the irrepressible Jakey. "How does they make it? Does they have a machine? I'm goin' to make some too when I get big; I'm goin' to have a machine and make lots and ——"

A frightened look came into the girl's eyes and her face paled. She turned quickly to the boy.

"Do you know any one makes money with a machine?" she asked.

"Me? Ach, no. But when I get big ——"

The color returned to Sarah's face. "Jakey," she said fiercely, "don't you know that makin' money with machines is bad? If you get pinched at it it's jail for long."

Jakey shivered. "Ach, Sade, don't scare me like that. I won't never make no money that ways if you gets sent up for it. How much farder is it to that park?" he

asked, eager to change the conversation to a less terrifying subject.

"Steen more miles," she told him. "Tired?"

"A little," he admitted.

"Aw, we ain't! That little Dutchman always gets tired first."

They trudged on silently for a while. Then suddenly one child cried, "I see it! There's the park!"

At the end of the long street the park lay cool and green, and the children jumped in delight as they drew near to it. Jakey ran ahead and seated himself under a tree.

"Come on, it's fine here!" he cried, turning a somersault on the grass.

"Go on," Sarah scoffed. "Youse don't want to sit near the street like that! When you go to a park go right. Come on in." She led the way to a cooler spot under an oak-tree.

"There now, kids," she said as she set the baby on the grass, "ain't you swell, though!"

"Say," asked one of the children, "wouldn't it be grand if we had grass like this in Red Rose Court? Think mebbe some'd grow if we planted it?"

"Humph," was Sarah's response, "how could anything grow in that place? The person named it after roses must 'a' had bats in his belfry. But, say, now ain't you havin' a swell time?" she said, smiling as she watched the children romp and skip, then roll on the grass. But the baby held her deepest interest. She found green leaves and put them into its puny hands, she invited it to kick or creep on the cool ground, but it lay inertly in the shade and looked up at her, a smile on its wizened face as though it were longing to convey to her some idea of its

gratitude for the relief from the cruel heat of Red Rose Court.

"Say, this beats heaven all hollow," Sarah told the baby, "for pearly gates and golden streets like I heard once are there ain't half as fine as grass and wind. Mebbe there's a part o' heaven that's got a park, then it'd be all right."

The section of the park in which the children played was almost deserted at that hour. Occasionally faint echoes of laughter and calls of other children floated to the secluded shade of the oak tree, but the children of Red Rose Court paid no attention to the sounds. Their hungry little souls were given wholly to their play. But suddenly Sarah held up a warning finger and ordered a crisp, "Shut up!" She held her head rigid in an attitude of keen listening; her eyes burned under her narrowing lids. Then she rose. She had heard the cry of an animal in pain and the derisive yell of a boy.

"Say," she told the children, "you kids stay right here, and mind nothin' happens to the baby. Jakey and me's goin' to walk up there a little ways. Youse stay right here till we get back."

"All right," they promised.

Sarah, going in the direction from which the sounds had come, approached a slight depression securely hedged by trees and shrubbery. As she and Jakey came nearer the whine of a puppy and the voice of a boy rose more distinctly.

"Where was we goin' at?" asked Jakey.

"To hunt trouble. Mind what I tell you, if there's a fight you keep out o' it."

"Fight?" Jakey cried in terror. "Ach, Sade, policemen gets you if you fight!"

"Shut up, you baby, and come on!"

Sarah tiptoed noiselessly to the little clump of bushes and pushed the profuse vegetation aside.

"Let me see once," whispered Jakey in awe-filled tones.

"Sh!" cautioned Sarah, "you stay here while I show that kid a few tricks."

Within the shelter of the dense shrubbery a boy stood at the edge of a small lily pond. He held in one hand a wriggling yellow pup, whose long shaggy hair was dripping from a recent immersion in the water, while with the other hand he waved a stick, and the frightened animal, evidently acquainted with the sting of sticks, cowered and whined.

"You little coward, afraid of water and a stick," the boy addressed the dog.

"You big coward!" cried Sarah as she took one big stride and stood before the boy, a veritable volcano of wrath and indignation.

"Who are you?" he said, laughing at her ludicrous, forlorn appearance.

"I'll show you!" she retorted. Like a flash she struck out a fist and hit him squarely on the jaw. The unexpectedness of the attack sent him reeling, but he quickly regained his balance. He faced her angrily. "You want to get pinched, you little shrew?" he said. "Another punch like that from that match-stick of an arm and I'll get the cop."

"Huh," she faced him defiantly, "guess he'd pinch you first for hurtin' the dog. Don't you give me none o' your hot air. You dirty thing, to hurt a puppy that can't bite you back! Why don't you take a cat that can scratch? You put it down!"

"I will not!" he told her boldly. "Run along and sell your papers, you ugly brat; this is my party."

The last words choked in his throat. Sarah, seeing that the culprit was obstinate, decided upon strenuous measures. She remembered a trick she had once used to rout a bully of Red Rose Court. With an agile spring she leaped upon the boy's back; in an instant her bare legs were twisted around his chest and her thin arms doubled about his throat so tightly that he found it difficult to breathe. He tried to shake her off, but she clung with the tenacity of a crab.

"Get off," he muttered thickly. "Can't you see—I can't let him fall. Get off and I'll give him to you."

"Cross your heart," she demanded.

"Cross my heart," he agreed, almost choked.

Sarah loosened her hold and slid to the ground, while he breathed deeply and rubbed his neck.

"Hand me that there dog. You ain't fit to have anything alive."

He did as she bid him and she cuddled the frightened animal in her arm. "Poor little brat," she said to it, "that bad boy——" She turned suddenly to the youth and ordered, "You devil, better run while the running's good. If I ever get my fist on your hide again I'll make shoestrings out o' it! Better run or your ma'll have a funeral to go to to-morrow! Scat!"

The boy had evidently no desire for further chastisement from her, for he muttered sullenly and turned from her, leaving the dog in her arms. Sarah fondled the panting animal as he snuggled close to her, his wet fur rubbing against her dress.

"Lucky me and Jakey come in time 'fore that bad boy

killed you. Jakey!" She looked around but the boy had gone. "Huh," she curled her lips, "he got scared."

As she drew near to the children a wild yell went up at sight of the dog. "Oh, Sade, where'd you get him? Is he yourn? Dare you keep him?" Jakey peeped round the trunk of a tree, his curiosity too strong to keep him hidden.

"You're a fine body-guard," she told him sarcastically.

"Me, I ain't nothin' at all like that, Sade. I just got scared when I seen there was goin' to be a fight and I run back here to help mind the baby."

"Humph, need mindin' yourself."

Here the questions came again. "Is the pup yourn? Goin' to keep him?"

"He's mine, and I'm goin' to keep him or lose a leg!" was Sarah's assertion. "Come on, it's time we got to the Court and them red roses." She made a grimace toward the sky and went on, "Wonder what nut named the place we live at. Like Mrs. Maloney says, 'If the fool killer ever comes along that man better hide in the closet.' Come on, kids."

So the little party with its new acquisition started homeward. As they passed through the archway and entered Red Rose Court a medley of shrieking siren whistles broke upon their ears.

"Ach, supper!" cried Jakey. "I just hopes we has cabbage again!"

One by one the children scattered, leaving Sarah alone with the Maloney baby and the dog. She wheeled the rickety coach as gently as possible over the rough way of the Court.

"Poor kid," she said as she peered in at the child, "if you ain't went to sleep in all that racket! Guess your

ma'll be glad, then she can get supper 'fore you wake up. Poor kid ——" Something in the rigid position of the child arrested her attention. She bent lower and lifted one of the tiny hands; it fell lifelessly back. Real terror seized her then; she shook the child tenderly and called, "Baby, darlin', wake up and smile for Sade." But the eager call met with no response; the child was beyond call of human voice. Sarah snatched it from the coach and ran into the Maloney house. "The baby," she panted, "the baby's dead!"

The mother's cry brought a crowd of curious residents of the Court. Sarah had to tell over and over the story of the trip to the park, how the baby had enjoyed the cool shade and had even smiled its thanks, and how as she wheeled it home she thought it was asleep. It was merely an incident in the sordid life of Red Rose Court, but to Sarah it was a tragedy. The little hands had clung to her so confidently, the face had looked up into hers with so piteous a smile. How it had seemed to understand when she told that fairy tale about the heaven she'd like to take it to! Was there such a heaven? Was even then the Maloney baby in a place where cool breezes swept their healing over it?

As she walked away from the squalid Maloney home something the bereaved mother had said in her grief, something about God knowing best, set Sarah pondering. Mrs. Maloney was a devout Catholic, and many of her sayings lingered in the mind of Sarah, who never heard the name of God spoken in her own home except when used in blasphemy. All Sarah Burkhart knew of matters divine and supernatural was the meagre, visionary knowledge she could cull from the few residents of Red Rose Court who clung to their religion despite the low estate

to which they had descended. Was Mrs. Maloney right; did God know best? Was He kind when He took the baby away? Just how He took it wasn't clear to the girl. She knew it would be placed in a little box and buried in the cemetery, for she had seen it happen many times. How did God get it? Perhaps at night when no one could see, angels came and took it to heaven. She could visualize the baby's smile when the angels woke it and carried it off to heaven. But how she'd miss it, how she missed it already! Why, every day while Mrs. Maloney was at work, she had kept the baby, loved it, carried it around and tried to keep it happy. She knew how to fill its bottle, and she had adored the way the little hands had reached up for the milk. Now it was dead, and Mrs. Maloney, although a widow with a number of other children to care for, would be lonely without her baby. She knew why it had died; the heat of Red Rose Court was too intense for it. Gee, it was a tough place for babies! Why was so much grass in the park and front of some persons' houses and not one stalk in Red Rose Court? Why could some people live in the big cool houses they passed on the way to the park and others had to live in places like the one in which she lived? Why could lots of babies be taken care of in fine homes and have comfortable beds and others, like the Maloney baby, had to drag along or die in the death-ridden slums?

"God,"—she lifted her face and heart to the sky, the narrow sky that looked down even above the Court—"God, I ain't sure where you are. I been to church with Catholics and Jews and Pros'tants, and every one of them thinks they got you in their place, but I heard the Salvation Army guys sing and tell that you was everywhere, so mebbe you ain't so far from Red Rose Court that you

can't hear me. If you can hear me, why I want to ask you can't you fix some things a little better? The Maloney baby just died because it couldn't live no longer in Red Rose Court, for that's a hell of a hole—dirty and awful smelly—but I guess I hadn't ought to talk to you like this, only I don' know much about you and the proper way to speak. I can't act the lady good, for I ain't never been learned, but I guess you can understand what I mean. Please try to make it a little nicer for some of the poor babies like the one just died, so they needn't die from being hot and not havin' what's right to eat. If you do that, God, I'll say hurrah for you!"

CHAPTER II

THE COUNTERFEITER

THE place Sarah called her home was a hovel of the dreariest type. Foul air of cooking, heat and accumulated filth greeted her as she stepped into the room. Against one wall a table covered with a torn brown oil-cloth was littered with unsightly heaps of soiled dishes upon which remnants of food attracted great swarms of flies.

Sarah gave one glance at the table, then she called, "Ma, oh ma!"

She received no answer.

"Puppy," she confided to the dog, "she's out again. Bet she's to Murphy's. If she comes back soused you better stick close to me. But she better not touch you, that's what!" A fierce joy of possession coursed through the child as she spoke. "The baby I liked is dead so you're all I got now, and my pa." She bent and bestowed a kiss upon the shaggy fur of the puppy, then began to ascend the narrow, dark stairs.

"Won't pa be surprised?" she said. "He'll like you, I bet."

Very quietly she opened the door of a small closet in the corner of a low-ceilinged room at the head of the stairs. Rows of hooks hung with old clothes lined the three walls of the closet. Sarah stepped inside the narrow place, pulled the door close behind her and with her free hand groped under the clothes until her fingers

found a small groove. In a moment she had opened a door only wide enough to admit sidewise entrance into a tiny room beyond the closet.

The girl stepped quickly into the room and closed the door. At the sound a man looked up nervously.

"It's only Sade," she hastened to reassure him. "See what I got!"

The man was thin, stooped and contracted, as though the little room had pressed upon him from all sides. His face was stamped with marks of weakness and dejection. The flickering light of a gas burner flared in his face as he stood over his work—he was a clever counterfeiter of American money!

Originally the little room in which he sat had been part of the closet. It was without windows, one tiny skylight admitting a pitifully small amount of the glorious light of day and the health-renewing fresh air. Shelves piled with boxes, a table with tools, and a stool upon which the man sat, occupied most of the floor space of the room, so that there was scant space for the child to stand.

As she greeted him he stopped working. "Hello, Sade," he replied softly. "Where did you get the dog?"

"Out in the park. A boy was hurtin' him and I told him skiddo and kept the dog. I won't let nothin' get hurt I can help; you wouldn't neither, pa?"

"No ——" the man seemed to sink into a reverie while the child petted the puppy.

"Ain't he a nice dog, pa?" she asked after a few minutes.

"Umph, yes," he answered absently, then roused himself and patted the dog's head. "What'll ma say?" he suggested.

Sarah frowned as she replied quickly, "Ma can say

what she's a mind to—the dog's mine and he stays with me."

"I hope she won't whip you again," the man said nervously.

"Who cares if I don't!" she spoke contemptuously. "I ain't afraid of her, ain't afraid of nobody nor nothin' but snakes!"

The man smiled wearily and Sarah added in a matter-of-fact way, "She's out again, guess down to Murphy's."

"I suppose so. Sarah, when you are older I'll tell you about your own mother. She was different—oh, mercy, mercy, how low I've gone! I'll tell you, Sade, you come from good stock, your pa is the crooked, rotten branch of a noble tree. Some day perhaps you'll be able to meet your relations, but not now, not now. I'm going to quit!"

The strain was a new one to Sarah; her father had never spoken about her people before, had evaded her questions, would not even admit that she had any relatives in the world other than him. What ailed him, what did he mean when he said he was going to quit?

"Quit?" she echoed. "Quit what? Makin' money?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes. I should have never begun it. But I did and when I see it come out so like the real thing it seems to hold me and just make me keep on. But I'm going to stop right now. I started taking the things apart. I'm going to break them so that no one coming here after me can be tempted. To-morrow we'll clear out and find some nice home, far from this dirty place, and live right."

"Will you take me and ma and the dog?"

"Yes. Now take the dog and feed him and let me finish up."

Sarah crept through the narrow door and the dark closet and went down to the kitchen. The prospect of moving away from the miserable place in Red Rose Court and being freed from the dreadful concern about her father's safety put a new gladness into her heart.

As she entered the untidy kitchen a woman came slowly in from the street.

"Ho, ma," the girl greeted her. "Where you been?"

The woman laughed hilariously. It was evident that she had imbibed too freely of some intoxicant. "Where have I been?" she repeated. "Where have I been? To heaven, don't I look it? Got supper ready?" She glanced at the table—"Now, Sade, where you been—to heaven too? No supper made," she laughed good-naturedly, "no supper made and your poor sick pa, him that's so sick that he can't come down-stairs to his meals sometimes, him that only once in a while can sit at the window and wave to my friends, him, your poor sick pa, has to wait for his supper! Ha, ha, it's sick he is, sick with a conscience! And serves him darned right for keepin' a conscience, *I* say. Sade, that pa of yours is a poor sport. His spine's turning to jelly." Here she seated herself in a rickety chair. "Whew," she whistled, "chair's wobbly." She steadied herself by holding on to the table and went on in her talkative strain.

"Say, Sade, d'you mind the day some one told about your pa bein' sick and one of them busybody nurses came to see him? How you talked with her down here and I went and pulled him out his 'labaratory' as he calls that nice little room, and how I stuffed pillows back of him and told the nurse he was gettin' better and we didn't need no help. Lucky for us then that he looks pinched and thin like he had the consumption, lucky for us. Bet

he's got the real con, too, by this time; look at him, so thin you could say 'pouf' and out he'd go! Yessir, Sade, that pa o' yourn ain't long for this world, but it's a good thing for he's gettin' too good for the likes o' us. What's that thing you got there?" she demanded, noticing for the first time the dog in Sarah's arm.

"A dog. I'm goin' to keep him."

"Keep him, that dirty little bundle of a dog—not much! Out he goes!"

She half rose from her chair but Sarah stepped to her quickly, a menacing frown on her face.

"Sit down, ma, you're drunk! The dog stays."

"The dog goes!" the woman retorted, her mood changed suddenly from jovial hilarity to nasty ill-temper. A sharp torrent of abuse leaped to her lips—"You black-haired brat with freckles and a pug nose, d'you think you'll boss me? I'll kill that dog!"

"Then I'll put the cop wise to that watch you stole Christmas and you'll go up for a while." Sarah spoke very deliberately so that the woman might not fail to grasp the significance of her words.

A livid rage spread over the ugly face of the woman. "You, you brat!" she sputtered. "You're a witch! How do you know I stole that watch? You're a witch, I'd like to kill you!"

"Then pa'd kill you and you know it!"

"Humph, guess he would get ravin' if I hurt you." The woman was silent for a moment. "He thinks you're an angel—makes me sick!" Her anger cooled as suddenly as it had risen. Presently she said more calmly, "Your pa should have been a parson or some such softy. Says he was good till he married me, says his first wife was an angel and looked just like you—uh, swell lookin'."

angel you'd make, with freckles and a pug nose—humph, makes me sick."

"Hush, ma," cautioned the child. "You talk too loud, the whole Court'll come in to hear the row. Better go lie down and get sober while I'll get supper. You want to sleep off that drunk for we pull out o' Red Rose Court to-morrow. Pa said so. We're goin' off to a new place far from here and we're goin' to live in a clean place and live right, begin all over again, pa said."

"Huh?" The woman looked up eagerly. "Your pa said that?"

"Yes. He just told me. He wants to live right now and not make money or do what's wrong. I'm glad. Mebbe I can have a new dress once in a while and if we live in a clean place pa will stop bein' so thin and sick lookin'—did you know the Maloney baby died?"

"Naw, did it—good riddance of the pesky brat. That stops your draggin' it round all the time."

"You—ain't you got no heart?" Sarah asked fiercely, but the sorrow of the child's death left her in no mood to quarrel about it. She sighed, and said, "Go sleep while I fix the grub."

The woman staggered into the adjoining room and threw herself upon a shabby couch. She closed her eyes but did not sleep. The revelation of Sarah sobered her muddled brain as if by magic.

"So," she thought, "this is the end. He's afraid of that conscience. He thinks he'll drag us off to some place out of the world and have us live right. That means I take care of the kid and work like a slave to keep a house clean and mebbe even go to church every week—watch me! I'm in the game too long to leave it

to turn missionary." She lay very quiet, formulating a plan.

When Sarah called her for supper she walked steadily into the kitchen, much to the child's surprise.

"Feel all right?"

"Yes, Sade, I feel good; guess knowin' that we're goin' out of this rotten Red Rose Court helps. You can keep the dog, I don't care."

Sarah smiled. "Yes, I was goin' to keep him," she said quietly.

Later the woman went up-stairs and found her way to the room beyond the closet. Again the man turned suspiciously at the sound of the opening door, then smiled in relief. "Oh, it's you, Mary. Where have you been all day?"

"Out," she said curtly, then added more kindly, "Come out to the room. I have your supper there; it's too hot in here."

"Thanks, Mary," he said as he followed her into the larger room where the heat was several degrees less intense.

"Sade tells me you want to quit and move out of here."

"Yes, Mary. I'm tired of this awful life!" He raised a hand to his throat—"I'm choking in there. We'll go away and begin life again. We can get a little place in the country and earn an honest living and there Sade can grow into a woman like she ought. Lord, to be out in the air, free, once more—what it will be for me! I haven't lived these years I worked in that hole back of the closet, I've been dying! What do you say—can you be ready to pull out in the morning? We'll take just our clothes; the rest isn't worth ten cents. Can you be ready?"

"Yes, I'll be ready," she assented simply, making no comment on the plan.

Her ready acquiescence touched the man. "Mary, you're good to go without fussing. I was afraid you might be hard to manage, but I'm glad there is so much more good in you than I dreamed. I am sorry I misjudged you. You will have a new chance, too. In the country, away from evil influences of the city, you and I can learn to be happy together. We must make Sarah forget these years in the slums—slums—I have kept my child in the slums——"

"Sure, it's never too late to mend, the preachers say," the woman consoled him.

After she went away and he returned to the little room to complete the task of wrecking the counterfeiting outfit, he thought of the woman. How much more tractable she was than he had dared to hope, how fortunate that she was willing to share his trial at a new, better life! There was good in her, after all. Perhaps she would yet come to love the child and try to be a mother to her—the child, the little girl who looked so like the woman he first loved, the only woman he ever loved—how he had wronged her! Had he been under the spell of some evil power, had it all been a hideous nightmare, or did he really bring an innocent child to Red Rose Court and keep her there through the long years? He thought of the mother of Sarah, the woman who had been with him for a few short wonderful years, whose going out had shattered his very centers of being, whose absence he had mourned and tried to forget in vice. For years he had failed so grievously in his duty to the child that the mere thought of that pure, devoted wife sent him shivering with shame and remorse. But now—he resolved he would atone for the neglect, and the

spirit of that first love would yet find cause to be proud of him. He would take up his long-neglected duty of being a good father to her, she should grow into a noble woman as her mother had been—so he dreamed and planned through the long night until he fell asleep.

Morning dawned fair and sultry in Red Rose Court. Early in the day Sarah's stepmother turned to the child and said pleasantly, "I'm goin' out for a little while. You know the rent is due and I want to pay it so there won't be any followin' up on us."

"Sure, ma, we don't want to do anything to send the cops after us now when pa wants to go straight. While you're off I'll put the clothes in our bags, mine in the old brown satchel and yourn and pa's in the big bag. Gee, I'll be glad to get to a nice place to live. Guess I'll be thinkin' I'm in heaven with the Maloney baby when I get out o' this dirty hole and live in the country. Oh, I couldn't be happier if I had new shoes and dress and hat all at one whack! I'll be glad to live nice."

"Guess you will," the woman said. Then she pursed her lips, laughed so gaily that the child looked up, astonished at the sound, and a few minutes later the stepmother of Sarah Burkhart went out through the arched alleyway, away from Red Rose Court.

Some time later a ragged little boy accosted a policeman and handed him a soiled letter marked "Important."

"A lady give me a quarter to give this to a policeman," the boy explained.

The officer opened the note and read:

"If you want to catch a conterfitter go to number 46 in Red rose cort. Be sure to hurry before he gets wise I'm squeeling. Go up the stairs to the second floor and find the closet, there ain't more than one, and push in the back

of it and see what you find. And tell the man I hope he likes that nice new home where he's going to."

Sarah was so busy in her haphazard way, packing the few miserably poor belongings she felt they wished to carry with them as they started off on the great adventure of finding that new home in the country where her father could begin all over again and she could grow into a lady as he had promised her she would, that the length of her stepmother's stay did not alarm her at once. But at length she murmured to her father, "I don't see where ma stays so long. Hope she ain't off again to Murphy's."

"Oh, no," he replied cheerily, "she wouldn't do that. She seems most as anxious as we to get out of this place. Perhaps she will be nicer to you when we get to the new place. There must be more good in her than I thought. She was so different when I married her, so kind to you and kept the house tidy, but since we sank to Red Rose Court she ——" he sighed. "What's the good of talking about it! We want to forget this place. Guess she'll be here soon."

"Mebbe so," said Sarah gloomily. "I wish she'd come."

"Don't worry, she'll be here soon. While you wait for her you might come up to the little room and help me carry down some of the tools and take apart the things I used—you know, the outfit."

The two crept through the closet and entered the small, stuffy workshop.

"Gee, it's hot here!" Sarah exclaimed. "It's so darned hard to get your breath here that it's no wonder you look like the wrath of Moses. I bet you're glad to get out of this place and kiss the little room good-bye."

"Yes, when I get to the country I can hold my head up once more. There'll be trees and birds ——"

"Oh, pa!" She clapped her hands. "Trees and birds—just what I always wished I could live near! I'm so glad I could cry! Ain't you glad too?"

"Yes." The man's voice trembled.

Sarah looked at him, her quick intuition helping her to understand what the life in that dark, narrow room must have been to the man. "You don't look good, pa." She eyed him solicitously.

"It's been awful, but I'll feel better soon, especially when my conscience stops condemning me so dreadfully."

"What's a conscience?"

But the man was spared an explanation. A sudden noise in the house startled them. Both stood in an attitude of attentiveness.

"There's ma now," said the child. "I'll go down and ask her if she wants that black skirt packed."

She opened the door, closed it, groped through the dark closet and opened the door into the bedroom and then found herself face to face with two men!

"What d'you want here?" she demanded, shielding the door with her tiny form.

"Hold the kid, Joe," the one man cautioned the other, then he stepped quickly past her, through the closet and into the laboratory before the stooped counterfeiter had time to defend himself. Weak from long confinement and foul air, the offender could not combat a husky officer of the law armed with club and revolver. As the handcuffs snapped about the thin wrists of the man he paled and would have fallen had not the strong arm of the officer supported him. The suddenness and unexpectedness of the arrest staggered the counterfeiter com-

pletely and left him shaking and bowed like a tree upon which a mighty storm has raged.

Sarah, held firmly in the grip of the second officer, grew purple with rage, then pale, as she beheld the fate of her father and realized its significance. The thing she had dreaded for a whole year, ever since the day she had unwittingly stumbled upon the little room back of the closet,—the thing that had haunted her dreams and hovered darkly about her waking hours, the awful thing had come to pass at the very moment when she thought relief from worry was at hand: her father's transgression against the law was discovered, he was arrested and would be taken away from her!

The fierce, impulsive anger that was characteristic of her nature rushed upon her with a new force. She struggled against the hold of the man, she kicked and screamed and fought with wild, demoniac fierceness, but all to no avail.

"Behave yourself, kid," he said, not unkindly. "Your father ain't dead yet."

Then the child changed her tactics and resorted to pleading and alluring coaxing. Her eyes brimmed with tears as she looked up into the face of the big man who gripped her.

"Please," she begged, "please let him go! Don't take him off to jail, don't take him away from me. He's all I got in the world but a puppy dog. He ain't goin' to make no more of that bad money with a machine. He was sorry he done it and we have everything fixed to pull out of this hole and go some place nice and live like decent folks. Please, let him go, please!"

But the man shook his head. "Can't do it, kid. Duty's duty."

"But it can't be your duty to get him sent up for long and me—what'll become o' me? I ain't got no other relations, only him and my dog. Oh, why did youse come here? Why don't ma come and chase you off?"

A queer, pitying smile flitted across the face of the man. Sarah read its meaning instantly.

"Ma squealed!" she cried. "I see it in your face! Oh, the dirty cat, I could kill her!"

The officer released her. "Guess we better take you along, for I'm thinking you won't want to stay with that stepmother. Go get anything you want to take, but better hurry up, we're going soon."

A little later the two men and the handcuffed incarnation of misery, waiting in the kitchen, looked up at the sound of the child's step. She had snatched an old hat from one corner, tried to pull her black hair into a less jumbled mass, and in one hand she carried the shabby brown satchel containing her clothes, on the other arm the little dog lay curled.

"What, you taking a dog?" asked the man who had tried to be kind to her.

"Bet your buttons I am! I don't go nowheres this dog can't go! He's mine, belongs to me. I got to look out for him, ain't I?"

"Poor kid," thought the officer compassionately, "let her take it, it'll be all she'll have to console her when her father leaves her." Aloud he said, "Well, take him along. Perhaps you can keep him."

A curious crowd gathered quickly in Red Rose Court. Dowdy, miserable looking men and women and a swarm of frightened, interested children waited anxiously for the development of the officers' visit to the Burkhart

home. As the three men and the child stepped from the house little Jakey ran to Sarah.

"Ach, Sade," he wailed, "where you goin' at? Are you comin' back soon? Why's your pa pinched?"

But the girl shook her head and would not satisfy the curiosity of Jakey and the others. Only when she reached the exit from the familiar Red Rose Court did she trust herself to speak—she called out a sorrowful "Good-bye."

So the little procession went out from Red Rose Court—the prisoner drooping, silent and unresisting; the two officers dignified and awe-inspiring; Sarah sad and agitated, her heart throbbing painfully; the dog panting gently and turning great brown eyes to the troubled face of his new mistress. It was only the beginning of the reaping that which inevitably follows sowing to the whirlwind. Sad it is that the offender cannot reap alone and be done with it, that the one who sins cannot eat all the bitter bread that springs from his sowing, that innocent children must share in the harvest.

CHAPTER III

SUNSET MOUNTAIN

THE great city of which Red Rose Court is a part maintains for its derelict children a reformatory modernly built and conducted. Situated eight miles from the city it lies in a pleasant country place where the beneficial open air can combine with human agencies for reformation of the unfortunate inmates. The boys' cottages form a small group at the foot of a great mountain, while upon the summit of the hill, appropriately called Sunset Mountain, stands the girls' cottage.

To that place Sarah Burkhart was committed after her father's incarceration pending trial as a counterfeiter. A reformatory—what evil thing had she done to be placed in a reformatory? The little Madonna of the curb, who had held for long hours the peevish Maloney baby and ministered to it according to her meagre knowledge and her rich maternal instinct—what tribunal could mete out to her segregation with vicious lawbreakers whose youth alone saved them from heavier punishments? Sarah Burkhart had in all her squalid young life wrought no greater harm than fight the bullies of Red Rose Court; deride selfish children of the gutter; garnish her speech with oaths whose virulence she could not understand; have familiarity with grating slang; staunchly brave the wrath and cruelty of her stepmother. Yet she was or-

dered to spend a number of years in the city reformatory and be branded with its stigma forever after. The law was inexorable. There was no friend to open a door for the child, the father grimly refused to make known the name and whereabouts of any relatives who might be capable of caring for the girl—the reformatory was the proper place for Sarah Burkhart, so decided the arbitrators of the law. And to Sunset Mountain Sarah was faced.

“For the love o’ Mike, where youse takin’ me?” the girl asked the officer after they had ridden an hour in a trolley and started up a long, dark suburban street.

“Ain’t much further now, wait till you see the fine place you’re going to, then you won’t mind the long trip.”

“Say, what you givin’ me?” she asked with a curl of her thin lips. “Guess a reform’tory ain’t no mansion. But I got nowheres else to go. Gosh, I could grind that darned stepmother into powder!”

“It’s all right, kid, you’ll be happier’n a flea on the collie when you get up on Sunset Mountain. And you got your dog—mighty fine of the judge to let you bring him along.”

“*Let* me?—why, I’d have to take him where I go! That devil of a stepmother’d twist his neck right off to make up for what she didn’t dare do to me. Guess I wouldn’t went no place he can’t go. Say, this is some climb. We goin’ up there? Gee, them steps reach clean to heaven?”

She stopped at the foot of the hill where the lights from the boys’ cottages shone through the darkness and threw gleams on a steep flight of mountain steps leading, it seemed, into the heart of a dense woods.

"Up we go," said the man. "Miss Hughes is expecting us. I 'phoned that we'd get out late."

"Who's she?"

"The matron of the girls' cottage. You'll like her."

"Huh, mebbe I will, mebbe I won't. Ain't everybody I like—I'm choicy."

The officer laughed at the child, but his eyes held musing tenderness as he looked into the face of the little girl who had been placed in his care to be taken to Sunset Mountain. He had taken many girls to the reformatory but none quite like Sarah. She was an odd one, all right, he told himself.

The numerous steps cut into the side of the hill ended in a huge bank where a wide road curved upward, meandering to the summit in a circuitous manner. It terminated in a wide plain where the great building known as the girls' cottage stood outlined against the night.

"Cottage," said Sarah scornfully as the building loomed before them, "some cottage!"

The twenty-five girls of the reformatory were sleeping when the bell jingled and Miss Hughes went to the door to admit the new girl.

"Good-evening, Miss Hughes," the man greeted the white-haired woman who opened the big door. "I've brought you a new girl, Sarah Burkhart, and she wouldn't move without that dog so the judge said let her bring it for you might be glad to have it, long as you got so much grounds round the place. Looks like the makings of a fine collie. Sarah, this is Miss Hughes. You be a good girl and do what Miss Hughes tells you and you'll have a fine home here."

Sarah looked very white and thin as she stood beside the tall officer on the wide piazza, but the moonlight shone

on her and softened her unkempt little figure. She looked up at Miss Hughes and a ray of light played upon her and revealed more plainly the narrow face and the questioning gray eyes.

As the child neither smiled nor spoke, but looked up steadily at Miss Hughes, the man asked half sternly, "Can't you talk?"

"Yep, when I got somethin' to say."

The man laughed. "Here, Miss Hughes, take her in, you're welcome to her!"

Miss Hughes drew the girl into the wide hall and after the door had closed upon the officer she turned to Sarah and looked at her under the revealing electric light.

"Well, Sarah, why have you been sent here?" she asked kindly.

"Um, guess 'cause I got nowheres else to go. Ma squealed on pa for makin' money with machines and the cop said he'll be in jail for long. There's nobody wants me and they said down to City Hall that the place for me is here and if I behave I'll have a good home and be kept from goin' bad. So they sent me and the dog up."

Miss Hughes smiled sympathetically. "You'll be happy here, Sarah," she said.

"Humph, mebbe so. If you let me keep my dog I'll try it for a while."

"We'll keep him. What's his name?"

"Ain't named him yet."

"What is in the grip?" She pointed to the shabby brown bag.

"Jest some clothes, but they ain't much good. Guess they're lousy, for Red Rose Court is the darndest place for crawlers."

Miss Hughes suppressed a smile as she replied, "We'll

burn them. You won't need your old clothes here, for you must wear blue dresses like the other girls."

"Gee, I'm glad. I ain't had a new dress in a coon's age."

"Now come with me," Miss Hughes directed and led the way to the laundry. "We'll put the dog to bed in a box here. Then I'll examine your hair and comb it and you'll take a bath and go to bed."

"Gee, this is excitin'!" the child exclaimed as she laid the puppy into his new bed. "Close them eyes, puppy, and go to sleep," Sarah said with all the tenderness of her big heart. Miss Hughes marveled at the sudden richness of the voice, the quick transition from half mockery to gentle interest and sincerity.

"Good-night, puppy," she whispered again as the door closed. Then she turned to the matron and said impishly, "Now you want to catch me crawlers, don't you?"

Miss Hughes looked down at the little figure and a smile spread upon her face.

"I am going to comb your hair," she said kindly.

"You comb every kid's hair that comes up here?"

"Yes, I do."

"And you never keep no bugs here?"

"No, indeed."

"Gee, this must be a swell place to live!"

"It is. But come, child, it is time you were in bed."

Miss Hughes led her to the bathroom on the second floor and when Sarah found herself in the spotless room with its glistening white tub and tile floor she looked about in frank wonder.

"Do I take a wash in here?" she asked, a perplexed frown on her face.

"Yes."

"But won't it get dirty and spoiled?"

Again the matron smiled. "No, child, this is a bathroom. Have you never been in a bathtub?"

"No, but I seen 'em lots o' times in the windows. At home I used to wash in an old tin basin, when I *did* wash. But I had to wash real often winters when I went to school for the teachers raise hell if you come too dirty—them teachers is fussy things."

Miss Hughes ignored the comment on the teachers. "Sit here," she told Sarah and drew a small white chair from against the wall.

The child submitted quietly to the combing of her thick black hair. After a careful search among the tresses Sarah suddenly burst into laughter.

"Find any crawlers?" she asked.

"No. I thought you said——"

"I was jest foolin' to scare you. I ain't got no bugs. Did it scare you?"

"Not at all." Miss Hughes repressed a strong desire to shake the child. "I should have combed your hair just the same. It is a rule of the institution to examine the hair of every new girl. Now I'll show you how to fix your bath and then you'll be ready for bed."

"You goin' to stand and watch me take a wash?"

"No. I'll wait for you across the hall. When you are bathed slip into this nightgown and call me. I'll take you to the room where you'll sleep to-night."

Later came the child's voice in a cheery, "I'm ready," and Miss Hughes found the new girl rosy from a vigorous application of water and a towel. "That white swimmin' pool's bully! Can I go in again sometime if I stay?"

"You take a bath twice a week."

"Gee, I won't have no hide left on me, with that much scrubbin'! You must act like rich folks here!"

"Child, how do you wear your gown?" Miss Hughes asked. The girl, unacquainted with the manner of nightgown fastening, had put it on as though it were a dress and buttoned it down the back!

"Ain't it right? I never had none on before."

"It should button down the front."

"Well, ain't that the limit! But I'll keep it on this way for luck."

Miss Hughes led the new girl to a little room furnished with a bureau, chair and a single white bed, immaculate with snowy spread.

"You may sleep here to-night. To-morrow we'll give you a bed in the dormitory with the other little girls. You won't be afraid in here alone? I'll be just across the hall."

"Me afraid? I ain't afraid of nobody nor nothin' but snakes!"

Once more the matron smiled at the strange originality of the child, but Sarah, not noticing the amused smile, went on talking.

"I seen beds like this a'ready," she said proudly. "I like clean white things."

Miss Hughes turned back the counterpane. "Now, Sarah, kneel and say your prayers."

"Don't know none—oh, yes, I do too," she added quickly. "Here goes!"

She knelt down, a ridiculous little figure in her white nightgown buttoned down the back and her dark hair streaming over her thin shoulders. Then she prayed aloud:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I hope the bugs will quiet keep,
For if they bite and make me wake,
The coodles out o' them I'll shake!
God bless my pa and my dog. Amen."

She rose from her knees and looked at Miss Hughes. There was not the slightest hint of a smile about her large mouth or in her gray eyes as she looked innocently into the face of the matron.

"Did you like my prayer?" she asked meekly.

"The last line was very beautiful," Miss Hughes said quietly. "You should pray for your father every night."

"Will that help him—how'll he know about it?" came the skeptical reply. "Mrs. Maloney, down to Red Rose Court, where I used to live, prayed her man'd get well and he died, and she prayed her baby would get strong and it died—looks to me like this prayin' stuff don't help much. Guess it's all bluff. The Catholics go to mass and pray on a rosary and the Jews go to synagogue and they pray and the 'Piscopals put on things like a Chinaman wears, I mean those that sing do, and I guess they pray when they sing so a person can't understand what they sing, and I don't see what good any of it does. You got to show me. How can it help my pa when he's in jail? I don't see, do you?"

"Yes, I can see. Some day I'll try to make you understand. In the meantime take my word for it—it does help. Now creep into bed and sleep. Good-night."

"Good-night," answered the child as she slipped under the covers.

That night Miss Hughes thought long and hard about the new girl. "I've a problem on my hands this time," she decided. "That girl requires careful handling."

What a strange mixture she is—sharp and alert as a money-lender, untrained and wild as the animals of the plains, devoted and tender to the two objects of her affection: her father and her dog. There'll be trouble if I lead her unwisely, she'll be all that is lovely and lovable if I win her confidence and guide her skilfully."

The next morning when Sarah awoke the light was streaming through her open window. She rubbed her eyes and sat up in bed.

"Huh, I ain't dreamin' after all! Gee, things is white and clean round this joint! A fellow got to be afraid to touch things. Looks like a horspital for it's cleaner than any house I ever seen. Wonder what kind o' joint this is. She that took me in last night ain't so bad, but it was no use tryin' to get her goat for she's slick. Guess she knows how us kids act. Good thing she likes dogs and is lettin' me keep mine, or me and he'd be goin' down that hill. Here, who's got the nerve to come into my room?" she asked crossly as the door opened and a tall girl entered.

"You be careful how you speak to me," the intruder answered, "I'm the monitress."

"So," Sarah said mockingly, "the monitress? How did you get that way—born one?"

"Oh, be sensible," the monitress advised, "or you'll get into trouble first thing and get all the girls down on you. I came to tell you to get up and dress. Here are your clothes. You want to hurry now for we'll form line in half an hour and go down to prayers."

"Prayers again? I said some last night. Is this a Sunday school?"

"No, but we ain't heathens here. We have prayers every morning and evening."

"Gee, the Lord's kept busy here, ain't he?"

The monitress suddenly burst into laughter as Sarah stepped out of bed.

"What you laughin' at?" demanded the little girl.

"You! Don't you know how to wear a nightgown, you goose?"

Sarah faced the tall girl angrily. "Don't you call me names!" she cried, "I'll, I'll ——"

"What is the trouble?" came the calm voice of Miss Hughes as she entered the room opportunely. "Lettie, what is wrong?"

"I laughed at the way she put on her gown, Miss Hughes."

"Well, well," said the matron soothingly, "we won't begin the day like this. Lettie, get the other girls ready. Sarah, can you comb your hair?"

"Sure Mike, but mebbe not to suit. Say, that girl's too darned fresh! She laughed at me. I could smash her face!"

"You mustn't be too quick to anger, child. There are twenty-five girls here with you and you must learn to get along with them without quarreling."

"Yeh—where's my dog?" she asked irrelevantly. "May I see him now and play with him?"

"After breakfast."

Later on, when the new girl stood in line with the twenty-five other inmates, she divided her attention between her new blue chambray dress and the many other girls dressed in similar style. Leaning forward she whispered to the girl next in line, "Say, don't youse all get mixed up, wearin' the same kind o' dresses?"

The other girl snickered and the monitress directed sternly, "Sarah, no talking in line."

Sarah turned and looked at the monitress, puckered up her face disdainfully, but the absolute order and quiet of the others restrained her from retort. She marched silently into the schoolroom, sat in the seat assigned to her and listened to the prayers and hymns of the girls.

After breakfast the girls formed into line, then, at a word from the monitress, disbanded and went to their respective morning tasks. The oldest ones hurried to the kitchen, others took up brooms and brushes and began to clean and polish the wide halls, still others cleared the tables and washed the dishes, and the little girls started up the stairs to make beds.

"What shall Sarah do?" asked Lettie as the new girl stood in the hall and watched the others depart.

"She may go with Helen," said Miss Hughes, "and learn to make beds. Sarah, go with this girl. She will teach you to make beds properly. Every morning you will help to do it in the dormitory. That will be your share of work for the present."

But Sarah hung back. "You ain't fair!" she said to Miss Hughes. "You said I dared see my dog after breakfast and now you ain't lettin' me. Gee, who wants to make beds!"

"Sarah," the matron answered very slowly, "you will do just as I tell you. Every girl helps with the work of the house and there is no play until that work is done. When the beds are made you may see your dog and play with him. Now go with Helen."

Sarah, unaccustomed to obey commands of others except in school and then in a desultory manner, stood irresolute for a moment. She looked up at Miss Hughes, at the clear blue eyes gazing steadily down into hers—she turned and without a word started up the stairs.

Ten minutes later while Helen was instructing her in the mysteries of correct bed-making, Sarah suddenly repented her yielding to the matron's command and burst out with a vehement, "She's a liar, that's what!"

"Who? Who are you talking about?" asked Helen and several other little girls in unison.

"Her, that lady in a white dress," elucidated Sarah. "She said I could go to my dog after breakfast and now she ain't lettin' me. I won't make no beds!"

Her burst of anger was cut short by a storm from the others. "Don't you dare talk like that about Miss Hughes! If Lettie hears you you'll be put on punishment. Why, Miss Hughes is dandy to us!"

"You bet, she's awful nice!" said another. "When I came here I was bad and she had to put me in the Meditation Room and when Lettie came to bring me my supper I threw the cup at her and almost hit her. Then Miss Hughes came up and she wasn't afraid, not even when I held up the saucer and wanted to throw it at her. I don't know what happened, but when Miss Hughes looked at me the saucer just got heavy and all of a sudden I couldn't throw it. I was ashamed of myself and I never had to be put in that awful room again. You don't want to get fresh around here and say such things about Miss Hughes or all of us will hate you. She is nice to us, but if you get too bad she has to punish you on the Homestead and if you get awful bad she'll put you in that Meditation Room."

"What's them?" asked Sarah, her aroused curiosity superseding for the time her sense of injury.

"Why," Helen informed her, "if you get put on the Homestead it means you stand in the hall with your face turned to the wall and you stand that way until Miss

Hughes gives you permission to get off, sometimes an hour, sometimes longer. And if you're getting punished in the Meditation Room—whew! that's awful! On the third floor is a little room with just one window and there's a bed, chair and nothing else in it. You get put in, the door is locked and they leave you alone to meditate. It's spooky quiet there, you can't even hear the other girls, and it makes you creep and wish you'd behaved. See, you might as well be good, for you don't gain anything by being bad."

"Humph," said Sarah slowly, "this is a funny place! Don't know if I want to stay or not. I might run away."

"But if you run away," continued Helen, "you'll be caught and brought back. The truant officer goes after all who skiddo. But there ain't many try it, for we like it here on Sunset Mountain. Last year two girls got smart and tried it, climbed on the coping one night and jumped off the porch roof and ran off. The next day the officer brought them back. So you see the best thing to do when you get put here is to behave and see what a nice time you will have. Miss Hughes is good to us. There," she gave a pillow a pat, "the last bed is made. You remember how to tuck in the corners?"

"Guess so. I'm goin' to my dog now."

"Well, so you can; your work is done for a while. Let me tell you don't you talk so about Miss Hughes that Lettie hears you, for she thinks Miss Hughes is the grandest thing that ever lived. You better keep on the good side of Lettie, for she's the monitress."

"Huh, I ain't afraid o' Lettie! Ain't afraid of nobody nor nothin' but snakes!" And with bearing corresponding to the brave avowal Sarah marched down the stairs.

When the children reached the laundry they found

Miss Hughes stooping over the dog. It responded to her petting by exaggerated wagging of its tail, but when Sarah appeared it forgot the presence of all others and ran to her.

"You dear puppy," she greeted it, "are you glad to see me?"

"He is, Sarah," Miss Hughes told her, "he is trying to tell you that. Take him out on the grass a while. The girls will show you what a beautiful home you have found—our mountain, the loveliest spot in New Jersey."

What the new girl saw as she stood with the little girls near the reformatory on Sunset Mountain was indeed, as the matron described it, the loveliest spot in New Jersey.

The building stood on the very summit of the highest point in that county. It was large and substantial, with its red brick front relieved and beautified by a great pillared piazza. But the spacious building sank into insignificance beside the beauty and magnificence of the scene around it.

To the rear of the house were fields and woods; to the west a dusty gray road went twisting past peach and apple orchards, narrowed to a tiny trail through the heart of a dense woodland, and emerged at last at the edge of a broad highway leading to the city. Before the building was a wide, sloping field where daisies and buttercups grew among the grasses. This field merged into another one dotted with scrubby bushes of sassafras and huckleberry, and taller growths of hawthorn and birch. Beyond this field lay wooded tracts, hollows and hills, and one great mountain that lifted its head high into the blue heavens. A little south of the house was a narrow, well-trodden path that led straight from the gravel walk which was around the building and down through the flower-

dotted field into a dense woods. There it twisted and turned among the trees and underbrush until, by a great boulder at the base of a giant oak, it lost itself in the wide dusty road that wound down the side of the steep mountain. To right and left the mountain road turned and twisted until it reached the foot of the hill and joined the wide straight road that led to the little town nestling under the shadow of Sunset Mountain.

To the northeast of this mountain was spread a grand sweep of country. One turned instinctively from the near view of fields and woods, however beautiful, and gazed admiringly at the panorama that spread out its glory in the fertile valley beyond the mountain. Like a sharply defined etching the picture held a constant fascination. Miles of green country, dotted with villages and farms, where at night lights gleamed like phosphorescent fireflies; white church steeples pointed upward among the trees and roofs; then, farther on, blue rolling hills hemmed in the fair valley and two rivers, shimmering in the sunlight like silver threads, showed in a gap between two mountain ranges. Sunset Mountain, where the wild wood breath sweeps over the heights, where the clouds hang low behind the stalwart poplars, where Nature is at her best and loveliest—Sarah looked at her new home and its surroundings and drew a prolonged breath of ecstasy. A deep appreciation of the place stirred in her as she stood on the summit that first morning.

"Gee," she cried, "it's bully here! Must be like that heaven I fixed for the Maloney baby and after I made it all up God went and made it come true. Hope I ain't goin' to die—this is too bully to last—guess ma'll be yellin' soon for me to get up and chase myself to the store or some place. Say, pinch me."

The girls laughed. "It is real, and there's lots of nice places here you ain't seen yet."

"Well, I kinda think me and the dog'll stay a while. Looks soft to me."

"What's the dog's name?" asked one.

"Ain't named him yet."

"Call him Jack," suggested one.

"Naw!" the owner of the animal rejected the suggestion contemptuously. "That's a common name. I want a real fine word for that there dog, for he ain't no common trash."

"Um," said Helen, "if I had a dog I'd call him after some one I liked."

"That's the ticket! Ain't nobody I like but me pa, so I guess I'll call him Jerry."

"Oh, let's christen him," suggested one of the girls.

"What's that? Will it hurt him? I ain't havin' nothin' hurt that there dog."

"Aw, christenin' won't hurt him. I went to the church when my little sister was christened and they just put water on her head and a man said a prayer and then she was named and nobody can ever change it."

"All right," agreed Sarah, "I think it would be good to do that to the dog, then he'll be named proper."

Helen ran for water and the children gathered in a circle round the animal. Sarah dipped her fingers in the bowl, sprayed a few drops on the head of the patient dog, then said, "You're Jerry, that's your name."

"Oh, say a prayer, quick before the water dries off," prompted Helen.

So, while the dog wriggled about in wonder his little mistress held him tightly in her arms and prayed hurriedly, "Dear God, I want my dog to be named Jerry like

my pa. But I want him to have a better time than my pa, for he got pinched, but I guess you know about it. Please fix it so that me pa can come out o' jail and live in a nice place like I got sent to. Pa ain't the right kind o' bad, not like some of the men in Red Rose Court. You fixed the heaven for the Maloney baby, can't you fix something good for my pa—and I guess that's all."

"Amen," prompted Helen.

"Amen," said Sarah solemnly.

"That's a funny prayer for a christening, but I guess it don't matter long as it's only a dog," was the comment of one of the girls.

"Sure not," agreed the owner of the animal. "All that's necessary is to have a prayer, don't matter what kind."

CHAPTER IV

SARAH'S LESSON

MISS HUGHES, the matron of the cottage on Sunset Mountain, was Irish, pure and unadulterated. This fact might be named as a contributing cause for her big heart. In her youth she had taken to herself two motherless children of her elder brother, taught them, loved them and worked for them until they were grown into womanhood and left her home for new ones of their own making. Then Miss Hughes found herself, a woman of forty-five, with strong hands and a courageous heart, eager to find some niche in which she could labor for the good of humanity. She found that niche in the city reformatory, and a big place it was, with troubled waters about it. But the dauntless courage that had lived in her Irish peers, Robert Emmet, Patrick Henry and others of equal calibre, lived and moved in her. So she stepped into the place with high hope and strong faith.

Before she went to take charge of the girls on Sunset Mountain there were threats of riot among them. Her predecessor, loath to surrender the reins of government, had planted mutinous seeds in the fertile hearts of the incorrigibles. But Miss Hughes entered calmly, took hold of the sceptre and before she ruled a month in the cottage on the mountain every girl loved her. Little girls whom parents and teachers considered incorrigible, tiny waifs—their parents incarcerated for some penal transgression of the law—older ones who had fled to New York and were

brought to the mountain with sin and rebellion in their hearts and defiance upon their faces—every girl, one by one, fell under the beneficial influence of the new matron. Which does not mean that they were suddenly, miraculously transformed into spotless creatures, for the tendencies of years are seldom turned in a night, the sins of long indulgence are not often changed at first attempts. But it does mean that Miss Hughes was gifted with that happy faculty of finding and fostering the latent best in others and that a real reformation was slowly but steadily taking place among the girls.

Sarah, too, felt an irresistible desire to please the woman who had taken her into the big building on the mountain and been so kind to her. The white dress Miss Hughes wore while on duty had a strange attraction for the new girl. Just to get near it and look at its snowy surface, to furtively touch the starched skirt and wonder how on earth it was kept so white for so long a time, was a satisfaction to the child of Red Rose Court, where nothing was ever spotlessly white for any length of time. Under the influence of Miss Hughes the activities of the new girl were gradually turned into proper and useful channels. As the child had been quick to imitate and adopt the grotesque slang and irreverent expressions of the slums, she was equally eager to pattern after Miss Hughes and learn new expressions and use less offensive language. The strong, inherent tendency of childhood to imitate others assisted greatly in the evolution of a more obedient, attractive Sarah. But there were many things which perplexed the child of Red Rose Court. If she had ever had a mother's training the uncertainties of her heart might have dissolved into faith. But she had lost her own mother in babyhood and had not even a vague

recollection of any smiling face bending over her. Then had come the miserable existence of Red Rose Court, the absence of her father and the discovery of the secret room beyond the closet, the unhealthy influence of the dull, sordid people of the slums, fortunately leavened by the wise, philosophical sayings of Mrs. Maloney. Sarah had learned early to wrest from existence the slight crumbs of happiness. Withered flowers from ash-boxes of the more fortunate, bits of tawdry finery discarded by them, were gathered while she watched cannily for the officers of the law who were so eager to call skiddo to the dirty, ragged child. Her thin legs learned early to flee with the swiftness of Hermes from the bluecoats, and her lips curled in childhood at law, order and its agents.

"Why do you call this a reform'tory?" she asked Miss Hughes one day soon after her arrival.

"Reform means to make over," the woman informed her.

"Huh, then you got some job on your hands, I'll say! I'd begin, if I was you, on that girl with the crooked nose and that one that's got tombstones for teeth in her trap. I hope when you make me over you'll cut out the freckles and give me golden hair like a fairy and make me blue eyes like a doll."

"Child," Miss Hughes told her gently, "we don't try to change the faces of the girls, just the hearts. But if your heart is right your face will be lovelier."

"Hully gee," cried Sarah gleefully, "then some guys got awful rotten hearts if you can take it from their faces! Why, there's a bad man in Red Rose Court most o' the kids'd run a mile from when he was drunk, for his face looked like the devil had got inside his skin sure. It was screwed in a knot. I punched him in the jaw once

he got fresh with me, then I run and he was too drunk to catch me. Mrs. Maloney used to say he had a face, or a mouth, I mean, like a poor man's lease—from 'ear to 'ear."

"Sarah!" exclaimed the matron, "are you Irish?"

"Sure Mike; that is half o' me is. Me father ain't, but even if he wouldn't tell me where his relations are and what they are, I know he's German—bad luck to it, I hate them Germans, all but my pa. He's one o' the nice kind. Mrs. Maloney says it's like this with the Irish: there's dirty Irish and there's nice Irish. She was one o' the nice kind sure as guns! But she's poor, so poor she got to work since her man got hurt and died in the horspital. Guess it's a good thing the baby died 'fore I come away from the Court for I took care of it when she went to work. She cried and felt bad but she said it must be a blessing after all—guess mebbe that there God she talks about ain't such a chump after all. He took her baby to heaven 'cause I was comin' here and He give me a dog that I could bring with me where I couldn't brought the baby. But just the same it's darned hard to have that poor kid sick o' the heat and die that way. Mrs. Maloney, now, she's grand! Always laughin' she is and that with all her trouble and bein' so poor. She says such funny things, like, 'The Lord never shuts one door but He opens another.' Guess it's the luck o' the Irish to be laughin' when they ain't got two cents to rub together. Mrs. Maloney said once she knows who God likes best, that He must love the Irish most for He taught them how to laugh. Me, I'm half Irish, for me mother was that. Pa says she was happy and like a sunbeam and if she hadn't died, him and me'd be a lot better than we are. But when I get out this place and he gets out o' jail, me and him's goin' to

have a nice house some place and I bet your life I'll keep it like this place. I never knowed a house can be so clean, thought just horspitals is like this. But, gee, mebbe it ain't swell to eat off clean dishes and sleep in a white bed and have the floors so that you could eat off 'em in a pinch!"

"Did you ever hear that 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness'?"

"Godliness—what's that?"

"Being good."

"Huh, *next* to it—it beats it all hollow and it's a darned sight more comfort'ble."

The days passed uneventfully to the minds of the other girls on Sunset Mountain but to Sarah they brought an intoxicating introduction with Nature. For the first time in her starved life the child of Red Rose Court roamed through fields and woods and drank deeply of pure mountain air.

Each morning during the summer months after the allotted tasks were done Miss Hughes and the girls went for a walk, an important part of the daily routine of the reformatory during the régime of Miss Hughes.

Sometimes they followed the road that wound past the orchards and entered the woods. Then the girls, treading among the damp mosses or stepping from rock to rock, searched for ferns and dug them from the black mold. They carried them, hardy sword fern or fragile maidenhair, to the house and planted them. Sometimes they crossed the grass at the rear of the house and wandered in the wide field of waving daisies and brown-eyed Susans which grew so tall that the little girls waded waist-deep through the white and yellow sea of bloom. Then the girls gathered armfuls of the blossoms and

carried them to the wide halls and rooms of the building.

Sometimes they walked through the grasses and wild flowers near the front piazza and winding their way in and out among the young silver birches, came to a field where wild strawberries grew in abundance, and later in the summer huckleberries and blackberries waited to be picked.

Sometimes they chose the gray road from which they looked away over the valley. But they never stood quiet for any length of time to look over the familiar panorama, but went lightly down the road that wound around the great hill until it reached the foot where the boys' quarters were. Then it went on evenly past houses and bungalows to a busy, noisy street where cars and wagons rumbled in great contrast to the peaceful quiet of the mountain. However, the girls seldom went out to that dusty highway except upon the Sabbath. Then they walked down the hill, sat decorously during the service of worship in a little brown chapel that faced the busy street, and at noon returned once more to the summit of the mountain.

Rude log steps were fitted into the steep mountainside and to these Miss Hughes frequently brought the girls to gather the wild flowers that grew in abundance on either side of them. The whole mountainside was a treasure trove: trees, centuries old—oak, poplar, birch, walnut and chestnut—grew so closely that their branches were interwoven. They formed ideal nesting-places for the myriads of birds who loved that secluded woodland. The girls, guided by Miss Hughes, became observant and gradually learned to differentiate between the feathered neighbors, their names, habits, songs and nesting-places.

The flowers that grew on that mountainside! One portion of the hill was a home of a flaming host of speckled lilies. A huge boulder partially imbedded in the woods bore upon its top a great clump of wild columbine. Along the edges of the wood pink clover stored its nectar for the bees, and wild roses and violets bloomed in their seasons. Goldenrod and asters made royal robes of lavish beauty for the autumn coronation of the woods and a hundred less conspicuous yet not less lovely blossoms embroidered each nook and open road on Sunset Mountain.

So, each day, whether they followed the road to wood or field, the girls of the reformatory drew closer to the bosom of Mother Nature, the little group of unfortunate children learned invaluable lessons from God's bright mountain top. And always the center of the group, the controlling, guiding spirit, was Miss Hughes. Smiling, cheering, loving, encouraging, helping; her heart filled and overflowing with real kindness and patience; her life an unceasing fountain of gladness, courage and inspiration—she was able, as few others would have been in her place, to win from each girl the good that lay dormant, to teach the wayward ones to pick up the tangled skeins and begin new patterns.

Sarah's initiation into the mysteries of the fields and woods was an hour of keen, intense joy. With Jerry frisking at her side she followed the girls and Miss Hughes down the mountainside on her first walk.

"Oh, look!" she cried. "What park is that?"

"Park!" echoed the girls with laughter. "This belongs to the city and is for us to enjoy."

"Gee, hully gee ——" She became speechless with wonder, but the phenomenal condition did not endure

long. Her attention was attracted by a splotch of vivid red. "Look," she pointed to a bush growing on the side of the hill, "there's a red ribbon hangin' on that little tree. Guess one of youse kids musta lost it."

The girls laughed as they drew nearer to the red object and it suddenly rose and flew away.

"A bird!" Sarah gasped. "A red bird!"

"That's a scarlet tanager. Miss Hughes told us all about it," one of the girls informed the newcomer. "That's the father bird and the mother bird is green, so that when she sits on the nest bad boys can't see her and shoot."

"Humph," said Sarah thoughtfully, "God's good to birds, ain't He, most gooder'n to people?"

The next day she confided to Jerry, "Say, I learned something yesterday you gotta know, 'cause I tell you everything I learn so you can grow in that fine dog like people say you are. I learned that God's good to birds. Miss Hughes says I have to learn to be fine so I'll match you, that I can't learn you nothin' I don't know myself, and I guess that's about right. You must learn to be kind and obedient. I learned from Miss Hughes that it ain't smart to do mean things to people, that's cowardly. She says, too, it ain't nice to say things I used to say all the time in Red Rose Court. My, that must be a dreadful place! We got to stop sayin' devil. Miss Hughes says nice, refined people don't say it—bet your buttons they think it sometimes, though, don't you? But mind you, Jerry, if I forget and say them bad words don't you dare wag your tail at me and laugh like it was funny, don't you dare! We got to stop bein' that way and act like ladies, you and me. We like it pretty good here, don't we? Ain't you glad now that bad boy hurt you and I

took you from him and brought you here? I knew you was! We like it here and we like the dresses and things to eat and the walks and the people, all but Lettie. We don't like her none, do we? She's too fresh and bossy and she laughed at me once."

It was true, Sarah persistently refused to be friendly with the monitress. The bright sayings of the new girl, the fact that Jerry was hers, and the magnetism of her personality, won for her the warm admiration and affection of the girls. But there existed a subdued hostility between Sarah and Lettie, due to the impulsive prejudice of the former when the older girl had ridiculed her. Sarah had a tantalizing way of uplifting her thin, pointed chin and pug nose perceptibly higher when she met Lettie, but the older girl took no apparent notice of the dislike, though she sometimes commented to herself, "Disagreeable, hateful brat! I'd like to shake her!"

One day the smouldering hate in the heart of Sarah leaped into active blaze. Miss Hughes, called to the city upon urgent business, gathered the girls together and told them she trusted every one to obey Lettie during the time they were without a matron.

"We'll be good, Miss Hughes," they promised her; "we won't give Lettie a bit of trouble."

"I'm sure you will do as she tells you, girls. Lettie and Miss Mary will manage things until I come back. Good-bye, girls."

"Good-bye, Miss Hughes," they called after her as she went down the hill. "Don't forget to come back to us."

The older girls returned to the kitchen where Miss Mary, housekeeper and teacher of cooking, was directing the making of savory preserves; the little girls gathered

to play under the sheltering branches of an apple tree quite close to the house.

"Did any of you girls ever run away?" Sarah asked suddenly as they played with their dolls.

"No, oh, no!" chorused the girls. "We don't want to run away. We like it here. Why did you ask that?"

"I just wondered if any one ever had the spunk to do it."

"Oh, if one of us ran away now when Miss Hughes is out and Lettie has charge of us wouldn't Lettie be sore! Here she comes now. Lettie, would you be mad if one of us would run away for you?"

"Run away?" echoed the monitress. "You're all afraid to do that. Go on, play with your dolls."

"Yes, that's more fun," said Helen.

A little later Sarah suggested, "Let's play hide-and-go-seek. I'm tired of dolls."

"Who'll be it?" The children danced about on the grass. "I'll count out and see," said Helen. "'My mother told me to take this one. One, two, three, out goes she.' There, you're it!" she pointed triumphantly to one of the smaller children. "You hold the dog while you hide your face and count or he'll run after us and give us away. Now no fair peeping!"

"All right. I'll count fifty. Remember, no going in the house! Go on——" she hid her face and began to count and the little girls scampered in all directions.

As she cried, "Fifty!" she put Jerry down. He started off briskly on the road that led past the orchards and through the woods.

"Here, Jerry," she called, "no one is down there. Come back!" But he ran off unheedingly.

In a short time all except Sarah were found.

"I can't find Sarah," the girl pouted. "I looked everywhere for her. Did any of you see where she went?"

"No," each protested.

"Well, Jerry went down that way," she pointed to the gray road. "I called him but he wouldn't come back——"

"Look there!" cried Helen excitedly. "There she goes!"

A break in the trees showed for an instant the fleeing figure of a child in a blue chambray dress.

"She's running away!" cried the children. "Call Lettie and we'll go after her!"

In a moment the place was buzzing with excitement. Miss Mary, her sleeves rolled up to her elbows, a worried expression on her fine, patient face, stood in the doorway and watched the pursuers start after the runaway. "It's just too bad this had to happen when Miss Hughes is away," she murmured.

Clouds of dust rose from the road as Lettie and a number of other girls ran after Sarah. For a quarter mile they ran, pausing sometimes to regain breath and gather fresh impetus. But, as the road was full of curves, they caught never a glimpse of the runaway.

"Perhaps she stopped and went in the woods," suggested one of the girls.

"No," was Lettie's opinion, "I believe she went on to the pike. We better go straight ahead."

Finally they reached the end of the road through the woods and came to the broad highway. There, standing pantingly in the middle of the road, was Sarah.

When she saw the excited crowd of girls running toward her she advanced to meet them. Her hair hung in great disorder, her face glowed scarlet through the

freckles, and there hovered a sarcastic little smile in her eyes and a twitching crooked smile about her mouth that stirred wrath in the heart of Lettie. When Sarah spoke she added new fuel to that wrath:

"'Lo, Lettie, are you lookin' for me? My, you sure must like me if you run like that to catch me on a day like this! It's some hot to run, ain't it?"

"You bad little thing!" Lettie retorted. "You need a capital spanking! I have a notion to give it to you."

"Go ahead," said the culprit calmly. "I ain't afraid of you. I ain't afraid of nobody nor nothin' but snakes," she added with an impish grin.

"Wish I had a few wriggly ones to scare you half to death," said the monitress as she wiped the perspiration from her face. "Where's Jerry? What did you do with him?"

"Me?" Sarah cried in quick alarm. "I don't have him!"

"He followed you," said one of the girls. "He ran this way and wouldn't come back when we called him. Now he's lost."

"He's lost," repeated Lettie firmly, "and it serves you just good and right, Sarah Burkhart! I hope he never comes back to you! I guess he ran after you and couldn't find you and now he's lost in the woods and you'll never see him again. If some of those people who live down here get a hold of him they'll chain him and keep him. See what you get for being fresh and making us all this trouble! He's too little to find the way home alone. Serves you right, Sarah Burkhart!"

Sarah's face paled. "I'm goin' to find him!" she said tremblingly, all her bravado crumbled at the loss of her

pet. She turned to the woods and called loudly, "Jerry, Jerry!"

The other girls stood, eagerly listening, but no answer came to the child's distressed cry.

"I got to find him"—her voice quavered—"I can't let him be lost."

She brushed her way through the tangled bushes and weeds and entered the dense woods.

"Come back," ordered Lettie. "You'll get lost too in that woods."

Sarah paid no heed to Lettie and the latter repeated her command.

"I don't care if I do get lost if he's lost," the child said defiantly, "and I won't come out till I find my dog! I want my dog!" She shook her head determinedly and went farther into the woods.

Lettie whispered to the girls as a sudden thought came to her, "Let her go a while. I'll get her out—watch her jump!"

"Here, Jerry, Jerry," the little mistress called tearfully.

"Oh," cried Lettie, "a snake!"

Sarah screamed in terror and stood as though petrified. "Where?" she cried.

"Coming toward you from the back!"

With another scream the girl rushed through the bushes and stood panting in the road. Then the girls burst into hearty laughter. Sarah looked at them in bewilderment a moment until she guessed the cause of their merriment.

"You lied!" she hurled the words fiercely at Lettie. "You lied to me!"

A wave of hot anger flooded over her. In a second

she stooped, picked up a stone and aimed it at Lettie. Simultaneously with the uplifting of her small hand there was a stir in the bushes upon the opposite side of the road. Lettie, seeing the anger in the child's face, dodged quickly to one side and the missile intended for her struck Jerry as he came leaping through the bushes to Sarah. The jagged stone struck his paw and he gave one yelp of pain, rolled over on his side and extended his bleeding paw to his mistress.

Sarah stooped over him, gazed into his piteous eyes and cried, "My doggie, my doggie, did I kill him?"

"Oh, you hurt him!" the girls cried in resentment and pity. "You hurt him!"

But Sarah did not answer. Tears streamed from her eyes as she spoke to the dog. "Oh, Jerry, don't die! You come to me in the place of the Maloney baby, now don't go off to heaven like it did! I didn't mean to hurt you, honest, cross my heart, I didn't! Don't die, don't you die!"

She picked him up, regardless of the blood that streamed from his paw and stained her blue chambray dress.

"Quit your crying," said Lettie in a tone of authority, yet a bit tender considering the passage of angry words that had so recently taken place. "Come on home. I'll fix him."

"Can you fix him so he won't die for me?" Sarah turned a blotched, smeared face to her erstwhile enemy. "If you can make him well, Lettie, I'll like you most as much as I like him." She looked appealingly at the older girl.

"Ah, he won't die. He's just cut a little. We can fix it."

The little procession went home silently. When they reached the shade of the apple tree Lettie said, "You sit on the grass here and I'll get some water and a cloth."

The other girls crowded near but Lettie ordered them to stand back as she came bringing water and bandage. She bathed the wounded paw and wrapped it in the white cloth, while Sarah watched, all the remorse, solicitude and gratitude of her heart written on her face. When the dressing was completed the mistress of the wounded animal looked into the face of the Good Samaritan and said, "Lettie, I ain't ever liked you since I come here because you laughed at me for wearin' my nightgown hind-side-before and callin' me a goose. But now you fixed Jerry so he don't die on me and I'm likin' you a whole lot."

The apology, crude yet sincere, touched the older girl and she replied, "I won't laugh at you any more. I'm sorry about the dog but I know he'll soon be same as ever. I'll tell Miss Hughes it was my fault for I fooled you about the snake. Now go change your dress and bring this one down and I'll wash the blood out of it."

The hot afternoon was merging, on Sunset Mountain, into a pleasantly cool evening when Miss Hughes returned from the city. The blazing sun that all day had scorched and burned with intense, relentless heat, had disappeared behind the great wooded hill in the west. In its track the painted glory of sunset was diffusing its colors through the sky. It flamed first in crimson and orange, then softened into amber and yellow and, even as the children on the wide piazza watched it with eager interest, the colors changed. Deeper shadows rested upon the distant hills, the western expanse of sky dulled into violet and faint rose, and finally the last tinge of

glory faded and the deep blue of early evening hung above the mountain.

As the last brightness died a sudden call echoed from the path that led to the mountain. "Oo-oo," came Miss Hughes' call.

"Oo-oo," the girls answered and ran to meet her.

Sarah hung back. She stood by one of the pillars of the porch, while Jerry, wagging his tail, looked questioningly up at her and urged her to follow the girls.

"You go, Jerry. But I was so bad to-day that I'm ashamed to." But the dog stood faithfully by his mistress while the other girls ran gaily down the path. As the matron, surrounded by the eager, chattering girls, came up the grassy slope, she looked in surprise at the lone figure leaning against the pillar.

"All alone, Sarah?" she asked pleasantly. Then, as she noted the flash of white bandage on the dog's paw, she said, "What happened to Jerry?"

"Sarah hurt him!" cried one girl, anxious to impart the news to Miss Hughes, in spite of Lettie's warning to keep silent.

Sarah hung her head and turned away a moment, then she raised it bravely and said, "You know I didn't mean to hurt *him*!"

The accent upon the last word conveyed to Miss Hughes an inkling of what had happened. "We'll let Sarah tell me," she said. "You girls stay on the porch a while and Sarah will come inside with me."

When the two entered the cool sitting-room Miss Hughes removed her hat and gloves and drew a chair to the open window through whose wide-flung curtains the deepening twilight entered.

"Come here, Sarah ——" the woman put out a hand

to draw the child closer, so that the little hands of the girl rested upon the broad knees of the matron.

Then Miss Hughes looked searchingly into the face of the child. "What is wrong? Tell me about it," she invited gently.

"I'm wrong—I'm so darned rotten bad that I guess I ain't ever goin' to learn to act like a lady. I'm ashamed—I was bad when you went off and after I promised you to behave. But I saw a chance to get even with Lettie for her laughin' at me when I first come and callin' me a goose that I clean forgot all about what I promised you. I ran away just to spite her."

"Where were you going?"

"Nowheres. I got no place to go to. I was goin' to walk around that road a while and then come back, but the girls saw me and came after me and then I threw a stone at Lettie and it hit poor Jerry and like to killed him. Guess if Lettie hadn't fixed it and made it stop bleedin' mebbe he mighta died on me."

"Well," came Miss Hughes' slow query, "did your running away to tease Lettie make you happier?"

"No. I—it hurts me in here"—she put a hand to her thin throat—"I never felt like this in here before. Guess it's because I remember now when it's too late to do me any good what you told me about gettin' cross and wantin' to fight. I used to think in Red Rose Court that the best fighter was the bravest person, but you say it's not always brave to fight."

"No, child, sometimes it's cowardly. The brave people are the ones who can control their tempers and not have to get what they want by using their fists. You forgot that when you ran away to tease Lettie you were grieving me, did you?"

"No, I didn't think of that nor nothin' else. I just got hot inside o' me. Guess I'm awful bad."

"No, Sarah, you are not bad. You have been disobedient and allowed your hasty temper to rule you for a time, but I am sure you have learned a good lesson to-day. You see how your anger and foolish prejudice against Lettie have made you hurt the very one you would not wish to harm—poor Jerry. We usually do something like that when we allow anger and evil passions to rule us; we very often bring suffering to the ones we love most. I want you to grow into a noble woman——"

"Like my real ma was," came the eager words. "My pa often told me she was the grandest lady ever lived. She was Irish and an actress and I'd like to be just like her so that when he comes out he'll be surprised."

A strange yearning for the little motherless girl took possession of Miss Hughes; she put her arm about the child.

Sarah looked up in surprise, then made a little loving gesture with her head. "You're nice to me and I like you," she said with the frankness of childhood. "I like when you hold me like that, for nobody never done it to me before, not that I can remember. Bet my mother used to love and kiss me but I was so little I forget it. I'm goin' to be good for you, honest I am, cross my heart!"

"I hope so, Sarah; in fact, I know so."

"What made that funny hurt in my neck when I was bad?"

"Your conscience."

"Oh, that's what pa's got! Ma said he had and that's why he wanted to stop makin' bad money and get away to the country where he could live right. If only he'd

had his conscience hurt him a little sooner then mebbe we'd gotten off safe. Gee, that there conscience hurts worse than bein' licked! Does it ever hurt when you're good?"

"No, it worries us only when we do wrong."

"Then I'll do my darndest to keep out o' bad things for I don't ever want that hurt in my neck."

When Sarah and Miss Hughes returned to the girls on the wide porch the twilight had deepened into darkness. The matron at once became the center of a happy crowd. The girls sat at her feet and on chairs close to her side.

"Lots of stars, Miss Hughes," remarked one. "Oh," cried another, "we had a pretty sunset! Did you see it?"

"I caught glimpses of it from the car window but I know it must have been gorgeous on Sunset Mountain for here we have the big sweep of sky."

"This is some dandy place. I'd like to stay here always," was the hearty expression of one little child.

"Me too," said Sarah. "I'd like to stay here till my pa comes out and takes me with him."

The girls rejoiced in that remark, for by it they knew that peace reigned in their little kingdom.

Evening on Sunset Mountain was worthy of the rhapsodies of the girls and Miss Hughes. Among the clumps of birches fireflies flashed spurts of light; on the grasses near the porch glowworms gleamed as though the stars reflected in their bosoms; far away, in the valley, lights twinkled in cottage and mansion; in the dim distance, beyond the silvered rivers, shone the lights of New York City; and above it all hung a radiant moon and the countless stars of a summer night.

The influence of the night radiance crept into the hearts of the girls, till they sang their favorite songs so softly that the sleeping woodland creatures scarcely awoke. Finally one of the girls pleaded, "Sing to us, Miss Hughes."

Others took up the request. "Oh, yes, something nice and lively, please do!" they clamored until Miss Hughes held up her hands in surrender.

"I'll sing," she promised and the next moment burst into the rippling "Killarney."

"There," she laughed when the song was done, "was that lively enough?"

"I can dance to that," said Sarah.

"Oh, do it, Sarah! May she, Miss Hughes?" cried the girls.

"Yes, go ahead, Sarah," agreed the matron.

Sarah withdrew to one end of the long porch. Then as Miss Hughes repeated the song the child danced. It was an original, elf-like dance, like the frolic of the Irish Little Folk. Every movement of the slight figure was the epitome of grace; she bent and swayed with the noiseless ease of a butterfly.

As the dance ended the girls clapped their hands in hearty applause.

"Where did you learn that?" asked Miss Hughes.

"From myself," was the grave reply. "In summer lots o' hurdy-gurdys come to the street outside Red Rose Court and we used to dance round in the Court and have more fun'n you could shake a stick at. I learned myself to dance to most any tune that I heard. I just make believe I'm what the music says and then it gets into me and I let it move me like it wants to. I used to make believe I was a bird and went flying way off over the

houses and factories and out to the country where the trees and grass and flowers are. But I never could 'magine the country was as nice as this"—her avidity for nature knowledge and communion was betrayed in the tremulousness of her deep voice—"why I would have called any person a liar who told me that you can honest-to-goodness watch the birds on their nests and go so near them you can see their eyes lookin' at you like they want to talk to you and ask you not to please hurt the eggs or babies! Funny, now here I am in the very country I used to dream about and make believe I was in when the music played fast, jingly things. In Red Rose Court, crowded and dirty and smelly I used to pretend I could fly like a bird and here I am where nothin's crowded 'cept the trees and flowers."

The children, unable to comprehend the full significance of Sarah's flights of imagination, laughed kindly at her. "You're a queer kid!" they told her. But Miss Hughes was mentally analyzing the child of Red Rose Court: all activity and energy; intense in her likes and dislikes; variable in her moods; bubbling over with sheer exuberance of spirits; imaginative to a high degree; susceptible to keen sorrow and equally exquisite joy; made to love and be loved with all the concentrated force of womanhood—a child after her own heart!

The motherless girl could not know it then, though she realized it in later years, that that night the great mother-yearning—the divine gift that dwells in every noble woman's heart—went out from Miss Hughes to the little girl and began its inspired ministrations for her. The child could not know the feelings she stirred in the breast of the matron who was, first of all, a mother at heart; the magnitude of the love stimulated in the Irish

woman who was destined to become a guiding influence in the child from the slums; but instinct told Sarah of the tenderness in the matron's heart for her and when presently Miss Hughes responded to the call for another song, Sarah sat with one arm thrown affectionately upon the broad knees of the singer.

"Sing something soft this time," one asked. Miss Hughes responded with that old, old song, so rich in true sentiment, "Believe Me if All Those Endearing Young Charms."

The years had taken from the woman's voice much of its strength and sweetness, yet the song pleased and touched the little group upon the porch of the reformatory. When she had sung the last verse with an added tenderness:

"No the heart that has truly loved never forgets
But as truly loves on to the close:
As the sunflower turns on her God when he sets
The same look which she burned when he rose,"

Sarah exclaimed, "Oh, I like that last part! That means that when you love a person you love them for keeps, don't it? You sang it like you meant it, Miss Hughes."

"I do mean it, child." The matron rose. "Come. It is time to go in."

The blue-clad girls formed into line and entered the house. They went to the schoolroom and after each had taken her place Lettie sat down before the old-fashioned piano and Miss Hughes took her customary place by the desk facing the girls.

"What hymn to-night?" she asked the girl to whom that day brought the privilege of choosing the hymns at prayers.

“ ‘Lead Kindly Light,’ please,” came the ready answer. Smiles of approval shone upon the faces of many girls, but each one sat with hands folded and body erect as Lettie played the opening bars.

Then the song rose: tender, sweet, pulsating. Miss Hughes joined in it, her heart throbbed with a great love and pity as the beautiful lines fell from her lips. Did the girls realize what the words meant?

“The night is dark and I am far from home——” little girls whose eyes were wistful with hunger for mother-love and their inalienable rights to the shelter and joys of a happy home; tiny children whose brief years had been shadowed by fear and suffering, darkened by poverty and begging, haunted by vice and corruption; little girls, robbed of their birthrights, sang sweetly:

“Keep Thou my feet, I do not ask to see
The distant scene—one step enough for me.”

Older girls, some mild and gentle, with faces marked with weakness; others with intense fires smouldering in their eyes—all joined in the hymn and sang, who knows with what true feeling:

“I loved the garish day and spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will. *Remember not past years!*”

After the hymn Miss Hughes bowed her head and at the sign every girl did likewise. Then they repeated slowly the Lord’s Prayer.

Afterward they formed again into line and, facing Miss Hughes, said in unison, “Good-night, Miss Hughes.”

She smiled as she replied, "Good-night, girls."

They remained in line until they reached the next floor. There they disbanded. Each older girl retired to her own tiny room, while the younger ones flocked together in the large dormitory where they crept, one by one, into narrow white beds.

Sarah, arrayed in her flowing nightgown, put on properly now, sank upon her knees by the side of her bed.

"What you doing?" asked one of the girls. "Didn't you say your prayers down-stairs?"

"Yes, but not all I want to say." And her dark head bowed upon the white sheet.

"Oh, God," she prayed half audibly, "Miss Hughes says it helps to talk to you and I think she knows about as much as any person you ever made. She says, too, you know all about us so you must know how I made a darned mess o' things to-day again when I was goin' to be so good. But please don't forget to remember that I'm sorry for bein' so bad and I really, truly, cross my heart, want to be good. Please make my little dog well where I hurt him and make him and me grow into a fine dog and girl. And bless my poor pa, bless him a whole lot. I couldn't tell you how much if I stayed here all night, but bless him lots and lots and lots. And don't forget how sorry I am for bein' bad. And—and I guess that's all. Amen."

CHAPTER V.

LETTERS

July 15.

DEAR PA:

Every girl here writes a letter to her folks once a month, so you'll get one from me that often. You are all the folks I have, all that I know about. Isn't it nice I can write you letters? That'll be a whole dozen in a year. We all sit in the schoolroom and write and then Miss Hughes corrects them and we copy them on nice paper. I can't write very good but neither can some of the other girls—you should see our letters when they are corrected—look like they got the smallpox, all marked up with blue pencil.

I'm in a nice place. If you could be here with me I'd like it so much I'd never think about going to heaven some day. Miss Hughes, the lady has charge of us, is nice. I asked her what kind of a place you are in and she said it wasn't so bad if you behaved right. Anyhow I guess it isn't worse than that little room back of the closet and now you don't have to be afraid you'll get caught like you used to be, so that's something to be glad for. I could cry bushels of tears if that would bring you here with me, but crying won't help a bit and just makes my nose red and my heart heavy so I am going to smile like Miss Hughes says is better to do. I hope you like it a little anyhow where you are.

The little dog I got that day in the park is here with me. I call him Jerry for you. He follows me all around the place. The girls like him but he likes me best.

Miss Hughes is nice to me. She is a kind lady and I am going to be good for her. I have been bad since I came here, but I guess if I can be bad I can be good, so I am going to try that a while.

Pa, if you could only see the flowers. Well, I'll tell you about them and you shut your eyes and make believe you see them and that will be the next best thing to being here. Back of the house is a big field, bigger than the whole of Red Rose Court, and it's chuck full of daisies. There are billions and millions of them and Miss Hughes lets us pick them and bring to the house to decorate. She took us to a place yesterday where red lilies grow. I found some pretty blue flowers like stars in the grass.

I have more freckles than any girl in the whole place, so that's something!

I help to make beds and work in the kitchen, shell peas and peel potatoes and do things like that. Miss Mary, the lady in the kitchen, says I'm real handy and the other day she gave me and some of the other little girls that helped her some cookies.

We had a Fourth of July celebration. We didn't have any firecrackers nor such things, but we had a grand holiday. We played under the apple tree all morning and in the afternoon we had what the big girls said were exercises. We sang patriotic songs, some of the girls spoke pieces and then we all marched round the house and waved flags. We had some ice-cream, every one of us. We don't get ice-cream except on Fourth of

July and Decoration Day, the girls say. But then we get molasses every day and I like that, but of course in hot weather the ice-cream cools you off better. After supper Lettie and Miss Hughes put off some rockets. Then we sat out a long time on the porch and watched the balloons. There were lots of them floating around in the sky and we could see them because we are so high up.

Miss Hughes says I am improving and Miss Mary called me a dear child the other day. Of course I'm no angel yet. Guess I got some to go yet. My dresses still fit on the shoulders—no wings sprouting yet. I guess I wrote enough for this time. When winter comes I am going to school but I like summer when we can be out and don't have to study.

I hope you don't forget me.

Your girl,

SADE.

August 15.

DEAR PA:

I didn't tell you that we get good things to eat here. Well, we do. We get molasses and prunes every day for breakfast. I like the prunes but the girls say when I have been here as long as some of them and eat prunes every morning for three hundred and sixty-five days in a year I won't feel so nice to the prunes. One of the little girls who has been here two years said last week that she was going to pray that every prune tree in the whole United States would die. But I like molasses! It is so sweet and sticky and just the next thing to candy. I hope you get molasses too.

We go to church every Sunday morning. We get

dressed in our best dresses, they're light-blue chambray. The big girls have gored skirts and shirt-waists and we little girls have gathered skirts and berthas on the waists. I guess you don't know what a bertha is—it's a wide round thing that fits round the yoke of a dress and ours have little ruffles all around them. They look very nice and I feel swell in my Sunday dress. It's the prettiest one I ever had.

I started to tell you about when we go to church. We have to walk all the way down a long road from the top of a great big hill where the reformatory is built. After church we have to walk up the hill again and sometimes when it's hot I wish God hadn't made any mountains but when I get to the top and feel the cool breeze and see how lovely it is on Sunset Mountain I am mighty glad He did.

I guess that is all for this time.

SADE.

September 15.

DEAR FATHER:

We still get molasses every morning for breakfast and also prunes. I still eat the prunes, but I wouldn't miss them if Miss Mary forgot to cook them some day. The molasses makes me feel like a stick of candy. I wonder if I might get tired of that some day. It would be a pity for there is so much of it here.

It is lovely here now. Last month we had lots of good times in the fields and woods watching the birds. There are little yellow ones come swinging on the daisies and grass right near our porch. Miss Hughes says their name is goldfinch. She knows all about birds, she must be awful smart. You should see the pretty blue bird we

see often on Sunday when we go to church. He's just a little fellow, blue all over, and he sits on the telephone wire that runs up to our place. When he sings he often stops like he didn't know the rest of the tune.

Last week I heard one girl say to another that if her father was bad she'd be ashamed of him, that mine is awful bad. It made me feel like batting her. I went to Miss Hughes and asked her about it and she said that no matter how bad people are if they are sorry and want to get good they can do it. God will forgive them and they can begin all over again. I'm trying to get this God business fixed so I understand it, but it's such a mixup. When Miss Hughes explains it I think I see what she means, but when I am alone and think about it I can't make head nor tail out of it. I think of you in jail and lots of bad people out of it and I don't see what God is trying to do when he lets such things happen. Then I think of Mrs. Maloney's baby that He took and I think He must be kind to fix things for it. But Miss Hughes says there are many things we can't understand, that even she don't know just why some things happen. She makes me feel better when she tells about you beginning all over again. You did want to do that but got caught too soon. When you come out I'll be big enough to keep house for you and we can find a nice little place and be happy. I help Miss Mary in the kitchen all I can so I learn how to cook and do things and will be ready for you.

When that girl said she'd be ashamed of her father if he was like you, before I thought I gave her a good punch. Then I was sorry and let her play with Jerry a whole afternoon to make up for hitting her. I told her that you made money and she said that some more

people ought to be in jail for making money out of children and poor people. The next Sunday the preacher said in church that the men who make counterfeit money are sent to jail if they get caught and he thinks men who make money because they make people work for a little in their factories should be put in the same place, even if they try to cover their sin by giving some of it to poor persons. So cheer up, pa, there are lots worse men in the world than you!

Miss Hughes says I ought to write you cheerful letters, but I can't think of anything funny. Something awful came near happening to me. I'll tell you and it might cheer you to know it didn't happen after all. There's a woman visits the home very often. Her name is Miss Dixon. Her brother used to be a Trustee of the reformatory. Trustees are the big fat men with lots of money and bald heads who come out here to see if everything is clean and right. Why, this place is always as clean as I think heaven must be, yet when Miss Hughes knows the Trustees are coming for a visit she makes us clean and scrub until the floor almost has holes. Then the Trustees, a big line of them, go all through the building and look into closets and corners, talk to Miss Hughes and the girls a little, and ride off again down the hill. Well, Miss Dixon had a brother who was a Trustee, and she has friends now who still are, so she is very much interested in the place. She comes up sometimes to see us. She must be rich for she wears grand things and rides in an automobile that has a roof and sides on it and a man to make it go. She's about the richest lady I ever saw, for she wears diamond rings and feathers on her hats, but she isn't nicer than Miss Hughes who has no shiny stones or feathers.

Miss Dixon came up last week in her car. She brought some other ladies with her to see the place. Miss Hughes called us into the schoolroom to sing for the visitors. You know my face isn't what you would call pretty, with my ginger snaps and my big mouth and when I run and get hot I guess I wouldn't take much of a prize at a show. I came in and sat in my seat and got ready to sing. Miss Dixon put up a funny pair of glasses with a handle and I heard her ask Miss Hughes who I was. She talked louder than she thought for I heard her say, "What a homely child!" I couldn't hear what Miss Hughes whispered. Then Miss Dixon looked at me again and I heard her say, "Yes, the eyes are fine but where did she get those dreadful freckles?"

Did she think I painted the freckles on my face? Before I thought about Miss Hughes and how she would want me to hold my tongue I stood right up and answered the lady, "My freckles come from when I was making mud pies and it splashed on my face."

All the girls thought I was funny and began to laugh. Miss Hughes looked so ashamed of me and I was sorry right away that I made her feel that way so I got up again and said, "I didn't mean to be rude, but I heard you wonder and said it before I thought. That's the Irish in me, to speak first and be sorry afterward."

The silly girls thought that was funny too and some of them snickered. Then I did feel ashamed. I was wondering what would happen next, whether Miss Hughes would punish me in the Meditation Room or only on the Homestead. Then Miss Dixon began to laugh. She laughed so the feather on her hat almost fell off. When she stopped a little she said something to

Miss Hughes and they called me up. She put her hand on my head. "I beg your pardon," she said like I was a lady like her and rich, "I didn't think you would hear what I said. You do have freckles but don't let that worry you for you have some brains under all that black hair and as Miss Hughes says, your eyes are fine. Look at me, Sarah." I did it and she smiled and I could have forgiven her for anything she said, for she was so sweet. She patted my head and told me she would come to see me soon again for she knew I would grow into a young woman to be proud of. I am glad that happened for now I know I have nice eyes. Freckles and a pug nose don't make a very pretty map, but since I know my eyes are fine I feel lots better.

Next week we all go to school. A new teacher is coming and we are all anxious to see her. If she's nice to us we'll like her but if she's cranky—well, she'll say good-bye to Sunset Mountain most as soon as she says how-do. I'll tell you about her next time I write.

Lots of love from

SADE.

October 15.

DEAR FATHER:

The new teacher came and is very nice—so far. Some of the big girls say perhaps she is foxy enough to get us on her side and then turn round and be cranky like some others they had. But Miss Hughes says Miss Fowler, that's the new teacher's name—is a dear little thing and I guess she knows. Miss Fowler is little, not big around nor up and down, but she knows a lot. She goes with Miss Hughes and us for walks and invites us

to come in her room after school. Then she shows us pictures and tells about them for she's been all over the whole United States! Oh, she has the most beautiful dresses! All the girls are planning to have some like them when they go out. She has waists of thin lacey stuff and silk dresses. She just wears those fancy things in the evenings when she goes down the mountain to visit some of her friends that live out where the trolleys run. Every Sunday she takes us to church. Then she wears a pretty brown suit and I am going to have one like that when I grow up. I'd like to have all my clothes like Miss Fowler's. Miss Hughes says we are going to have a lovely winter on our mountain now that Miss Fowler is here. We are to learn to make baskets out of grass and some other stuff Miss Fowler calls raffia. She showed us some pretty ones she made.

The goldenrod is out, lots and lots of it. There's a big patch along the road and there are blue asters growing near it. The trees are showing gay colors, a little red and yellow and the girls say Sunset Mountain will soon be like a picture. Last night the sunset was so pretty it made that funny hurt come in my throat like I felt the first time I knew I had a conscience, the time I was bad and hurt Jerry. I was wishing you could see it too.

Miss Dixon was here the other day and saw my dog. She asked me what I would take for him and I told her he is not for sale. She tried to coax me to sell him but I said that if she was rich as the Midas in the Reader in school and could make every leaf on our mountain turn to gold she wouldn't have enough money to buy that dog! Then she laughed and called me an original, clever child and said I should always be loyal like that and take good

care of the dog. He is fine now, with his white collar of hair round his neck, that looks like the one Queen Elizabeth wears in the History book.

Much love from

JERRY AND SADE.

November 15.

DEAR PA:

We have no flowers now. They are all dead but Miss Hughes says they are just sleeping and will come back to us in the spring. A few butterflies still come around but their wings are torn and ragged and I guess they will die too before long. Sometimes I make up poetry just because something inside me makes me feel like it. One of the girls showed some to Miss Hughes and Miss Fowler and they said I have talent for it, that perhaps some day I might be a real writer of things that sing. So now I am going to practice writing poetry a lot and when I grow up you can be proud of me. Here is one I wrote about the flowers and called, "The Death of the Butterfly." Helen says it makes her feel like crying but I hope you won't feel that way for it is the nicest one I ever did and I want you to read it.

THE DEATH OF THE BUTTERFLY

The flowers are all dead

But they'll grow again in the spring,
The birds all went far away from here

But some day we'll hear them sing.
But the poor little butterfly

With its wings so pretty all ragged and tore
Will soon die too and stay dead

Forever and evermore,

I hope that God will fix a heaven for the poor butterflies, don't you?

I am learning to sew. Miss Hughes teaches us to make all our own clothes. Oh, I am making a new blue chambray dress for myself and am prouder of it than an Irishman in his new policeman uniform. When I first came here it seemed strange to see so many girls all dressed in the very same kind of dresses but I'm getting used to seeing a pack of girls that look just like me and forget all about it until we go to church Sunday mornings and see people watch us and whisper about us to each other. Guess they are glad their children are not sent to a reformatory but some of them act in church like they needed to be sent some place and be taught manners. But most of the people in the church are nice to us and say good-morning to us after church. Listen, pa, while I tell you about the funny kid was sent here last week. Just a skinny young one, nine years old, but she looked tougher than leather. The things that kid said to Miss Hughes the first day—whew, if that lady weren't an angel she'd have thrashed the hide off the young one! Well, the new girl sat beside me the first Sunday in church and when the preacher got up to read the Bible she whispered to me, "Is that God talking?" I hushed her up and thought when we got out I'd tell her how a church is run, but after a while another man, a young one, got up to preach and she whispered again, "Now, that's God's Son, ain't it!" And she smiled like she discovered some great secret. I told Miss Hughes about it and she looked sad and said something about the heathen in our midst and then she took that new girl in her room and talked to her a while. And I bet my new Sunday shoes that Miss Hughes makes something more than a

heathen out that girl. Miss Hughes is like—well, I wish I could write some poetry about her telling just what I think of her—she's like sunshine, sunshine on a rainy day, water when you are thirsty, she is like what I like to think my own mother would be if she was living.

Miss Fowler is nice to us too and I guess that is lucky for her. The girls said the last teacher they had was a grouch and she told the girls they were bad, that she knew why they had been sent to that reformatory, that there was no good in them and if they did not mind her she'd have them sent to prison as soon as they were old enough. Well, it got so hot for her that she left and now we have Miss Fowler. She and Miss Hughes and Miss Mary sit together after we go to bed and Miss Fowler says she is gaining so much from Miss Hughes. Wish I would grow to be a nice woman like that, nice and good yet laughing and liking fun like Miss Hughes does. So you see we are all happy here and I hope you are the same.

With love,

SADE.

December 15.

DEAR FATHER:

I hope you had a nice Thanksgiving. Lettie says that is a funny thing to say to you but I mean I hope you had a nice one in your heart no matter where you were. You could be thankful that you are not there because you did some dreadful thing like many people do, and you could be thankful that I have a nice home and am growing and learning to work and to make bas-

kets and lots of other things and that I don't have to live with ma any more and you don't neither and that I have nice clean dresses now and shoes and won't have to be cold or hungry once all this whole winter coming. Miss Hughes says there is a silver lining to every cloud and I hope you can see yours.

Lettie is going away from the reformatory next week. She has been obedient and now she will have a fine home with nice people who want her to take care of two children. She isn't anxious to go for we all like the mountain but the place she is going the people are friends to Miss Hughes and so she won't be treated like a slave as some of the girls were who went out to work and earn money. We can't stay here forever and the Trustees want every girl to go as soon as she is good enough and knows enough to help herself out in the world. Oh, I don't want to be sent out to people I don't know and have to work for them! I hope you get out soon and take me to a nice home. I like it here and am learning so much that is making me a better girl, Miss Hughes tells me. Sometimes I have to be punished for the good of my soul, as she says. Last week in school Helen got up and when she came to the part in the reading lesson that says, "Darkness falls over the land" she said, "Darkness stumbles over the land." I got the giggles and the teacher had to scold me to make me stop.

Miss Hughes gave me a doll dressed in white, and has eyes that shut when you lay it down. It is the very first nice doll I ever got and I am going to keep it until I am big and I can show it to my children and tell them about Miss Hughes and ask them, "Aren't you glad you have a nice mother to love you and take care of you and don't

have to be brought up by strangers in a bad place?" I bet that will make them happy.

Our mountain is pretty now, all covered with snow, but the snow stays white. In Red Rose Court, you remember, it used to be black most as soon as it hit the ground, but here it is white, so white it hurts your eyes. Last evening Miss Hughes called us to see the sunset. The trees on the hills and all around were covered with ice and the sky was red and yellow and when it shined on the trees they looked nicer than any picture I ever saw and sparkled more than the diamonds and things we used to see in the windows on Fourth Street. Miss Hughes said it looked like a glimpse of heaven—if heaven is half that fine I think I'd like to get there too.

We went down the hill in the snow Sunday to church. Wore our coats and blue hats with red ribbons on them—one of the Trustees must like red for we have it on all our hats and use it for hair ribbons most of the time, but I am not kicking about it for it's a sight better than the shoe string I used to tie round my plait down in Red Rose Court. After Christmas Miss Fowler is going to teach us to make raffia hats and Miss Hughes is going to try to get blue ribbon for them.

We still get molasses every day. Some time ago I got tired of it so now I do without it for a few days then I am glad to eat it again. Just think of getting tired of anything sweet like molasses! I never thought I'd do that! I am learning lots of things here on the top of the mountain. You need not feel sad about me, but if you ever do then try to think ahead to the time when you and I can have a little home. I think that will be wonderful, for I will know how to keep house and cook for

you and we can live like decent people. I hope you are well and happy. And I send you much love from Jerry and me.

SARAH.

CHAPTER VI

AFTER SIX YEARS—MORE LETTERS

DEAR FATHER:

When I wrote my first letter to you from this place I never dreamed I would be writing from it after six years. But here I am, still on Sunset Mountain, thanks to Miss Hughes and Miss Dixon. You remember the latter as the woman who has influential friends, Trustees of the reformatory, and whose interest I once gained by some childish remarks about my countless freckles. The combined petitions of Miss Dixon and Miss Hughes have spared me the unhappiness of being "loaned" to some busy housewife who desired the valuable but surprisingly cheap services of a young girl who could be transformed, or deformed, into a submissive, patient slave. Miss Dixon has done much for me in that way but Miss Hughes—God be good to her forever—she has been my white angel of deliverance these six years! Guess the Irish in her calls to the Irish in me. As soon as I finished the eighth grade in school—reformatory girls evidently need no more extensive education than that—she persuaded the Trustees to have me appointed assistant in the kitchen! So now I am earning my living in the very place I have been—I was going to say imprisoned, but that would not be fair, for it has been anything but that. Some matrons would have made it that, out never Miss Hughes. I am to work for my board and

clothes until I am eighteen and then if I remain I shall be placed on the pay-roll. Imagine, Sade of Red Rose Court being paid from the city treasury! I'm climbing up, father. In the meantime I am to help Miss Mary, relieve Miss Hughes in any way I can, take visitors through the place, help to watch and guide the girls and have one afternoon each week and also every other Sunday for my own. I'll be going back to Red Rose Court some day soon to see Mrs. Maloney. She'll hardly know me, for I have grown tall and—you'll be glad to hear it—a trifle better looking. Miss Hughes says I have improved wonderfully but it does make a difference when one is clean and well fed and looked after.

One of the first trips I take will be to see you. Miss Hughes is going to bring me, father. After all these years—to see you once more—I can scarcely wait patiently for the time. I do long to see you. Why can't time fly until the time when you can be free! If I allowed my thoughts to dwell upon your lot, your life in that dreadful place—I just have to set my Irish working and make myself stop worrying. Sometimes when Miss Hughes talks to me and tries to make me take a philosophical view of it I can see that your punishment is just, if hard. But at other moments I rebel against the long years you have been paying and still must pay for the offense against the law. Are you not getting more than you deserve, greater punishment than you earned? You made money out of metal, others coin it from the blood, body and very sinews of children and underpaid older workers and by turning a pitiable small portion of the ill-gotten wealth into the coffers of charity are lauded as philanthropists. Surely, your state is more to be desired than theirs! The time of reckoning is inevitable

and I'd rather have your chance of future happiness than theirs. Miss Hughes says there will always be injustice in this world, that the only way to meet it is to be personally just and do the right thing and leave the rest to Providence. I wish I had her magnificent faith and hope and could look at life as she does. What a friend she has been to me! She is a Catholic, a devout one, and I am a Protestant but if the East and the West *can't* meet they can look across to each other and understand. I don't know whether Miss Hughes prays for my soul or if when I die she'll have prayers said to try to have me delivered from purgatory, but I do know that while I am living with her she is just as kind to me as though I were of her own faith. And come to think about it, that's a big thing to say and proves that there is no narrowness or bigotry about Miss Hughes. She encourages me to go to church. It was forced upon me during the six years I was an inmate of the reformatory but since I am a worker there I have the blessed privilege of doing as I please in many matters and I have found to my utter surprise that I please to continue doing many of the very things I thought were irksome duties when they were compulsory. So I go often to the little chapel at the foot of the mountain. Sometimes I feel happier as I sit there and listen to the music and the words of the old clergyman, other days I am possessed with a restlessness and trouble, which surges through me so that I want to run out from the church and find some lonely spot and just cry. Will I ever feel the contentment and peace so many people seem to have? How can I attain to the poise and sane thinking of Miss Hughes? Will that childish desire to laugh and cry all at the same time ever be controlled—glory, what a doleful letter! Sounds like

the Irish in me is clean dead. But I'll cheer myself up in one second—that's the glorious part of having Irish in your veins! How's this for a gloom chaser—Miss Hughes went to a wake recently. They had holy water in the room and a woman came in and dipped her fingers into the saucer on the mantelpiece, thinking it was the holy water. But some one had snuffed the candles and laid the black ends in that saucer and the woman daubed it all over her face when she went to make the sign of the cross. It looked ridiculous, of course—I feel cheered up and hope you do too.

I must tell you about our Memorial Day. We all got up early. I helped the little girls get dressed, combed the hair of ten—won't I make a fine stepmother for a widower with ten children—and then I helped shoo them down-stairs to get their work all done early. They cleaned and polished floors in record time that day. Then we went out to the big field back of the house and picked daisies, bushels of them! It was a picture for an artist, the daisy field with twenty girls in blue chambray dresses, each one picking daisies until her arms ached. We carried them to the laundry and made wreaths and long chains of them. It looked like a fairy bower. In the afternoon we went down the mountain to the little cemetery near the chapel. People looked at us as we passed their houses and I speculated upon what their thoughts might be. Were we just bad girls, parading with flowers whose beauty and symbolism we could not appreciate; were we poor unfortunates who merited pity, the far-off variety, and might even be prayed over; were we wood nymphs resurrected for the occasion and presenting a charming picture as we went along swinging our daisy chains?

At the cemetery we stood in a half circle, Miss Hughes near by. After addresses about the brave soldiers, and a few of the old patriotic songs, we sang, "Cover Them Over with Beautiful Flowers" and as we sang we marched round and placed our flowers on the graves marked with the flag. People were lovely to us, they seemed to forget that we came from the dreadful red brick reformatory on the summit of the great hill.

As we walked home Miss Hughes told us about her brother who marched away with the others and never came back. How her mother used to keep a lamp in the window for him for a long time, thinking perhaps he would return, but he never came back. Then we felt something of what it must have meant to see your own dear ones march away to war. It was a beautiful day and I suppose it was "good for our souls," as Miss Hughes says so many times, but it was sad. Next time, father, I promise you to write a wholly cheerful letter.

With love,

SARAH.

DEAR FATHER:

This is going to be my joy letter. Like the man who went slumming and took some poor ragged youngsters on a picnic and told them he wanted them to have a good time, he'd *make* them have a good time, if he had to lick every blooming kid to get it! So I'm going to be cheerful if I lose a leg, as Mrs. Maloney used to say. Do you remember the time a dog bit her and when some one asked her whether he was mad she said, "Mad—the dog! What call had he to be mad? Ain't I the one ought to be mad!" She was funny.

This mountain is the finest place ever created. We

have wild strawberries, so many of them we can scarcely pick them all and when we do pick them we have to tramp a lot for they grow so thick. We get enough for Miss Mary and the girls to make shortcake for all hands—mouths, I should say. Miss Mary could make food for an Irish king. I never saw her beat.

Last week we found a chewinks' nest. I was walking along in the grass when a brown bird flew out of a clump of weeds and there was the prettiest nest right on the ground. Such a fuss as they made! Daddy chewink came with his black hood and both yelled "Chewink" until I pitied them and went off. Later I heard him sing, perched way up in a tree he was, and he called, "Sweetheart, I'm here!" I loved him for that. But last week when Miss Hughes took me to the Zoo and we were in the bird house I heard that same "Sweetheart, I'm here!" And when I looked, there in a corner of a big cage sat a melancholy daddy chewink, without his mate, far away from nests and green woods and all that he loved. I could have cried for that bird. I wanted to steal him and let him fly. Is there anything sadder than a caged bird? His wings useless, those wonderful wings that can carry him soaring among the clouds! But I'm forgetting—I'm not to be writing anything mournful, so I think a little harder and decide that perhaps the chewink is happier there in the cage than in the open. I can find several good arguments in favor of that theory—isn't he safer, hasn't he food brought to him instead of having to hunt for it—what more could any bird want? That chewink is a darned lucky bird if he only knew it!

Here's some news! The girls of this reformatory are making good citizens out in the world. Miss Hughes and I hunted up the records and found that over half of

the girls parolled have gone straight. Sure, father, I'm in the right half! And perhaps there is still some good in those whom we counted in the wrong half. You have heard of the people who wanted to stone a wicked person and were told that the privilege of throwing the first stone belonged to the one who was without sin. If everybody could remember that story and profit by it wouldn't this whole world be nice as Ireland must be!

I told you once about writing poetry. Since I am older I feel guilty when I name it that, but I do sometimes scribble little rhymes and jingles. I have kept them all in a little book so that no literary masterpiece be carelessly lost to the world. I think you might like to read some of my attempts.

“If you were here, if you were here,
 Oh, love, what happiness!
 I would not ask that you should cheer
 With kisses or caress.
 But just to sit there in the light
 And let me look a while
 Into your eyes and read all's right,
 And see your old time smile.

“If you were here I'd only look
 Into your eyes so deep,
 As blossoms growing by the brook
 Watch o'er their shadows keep.
 What need of paltry words to fling
 When hearts are opened wide?
 The eyes can speak! The eyes can sing!
 When we are satisfied.”

I thought of you when I wrote that, father. Hope you'll like it.

I am having great fun teaching the girls new songs. Miss Fowler taught me how to play songs and hymns and I've had more pleasure drumming the old square piano in the schoolroom than you could shake a stick at. During the summer when the teacher is away I take charge of the music at prayers and sometimes when it is raining we all gather in the schoolroom and sing. I found a new song last week. It goes like this, part of it:

“O, the goal of the world is joy,
 Joy divine that is born of love.
 Sorrows are wings that safe convoy
 The soul to the fairer realms above.”

Don't you think there is some comfort in knowing that? Can you believe it? I think it is sometimes almost impossible to do as Tennyson says, “Reach a hand through time to catch the far-off interest of tears” but it is comforting to think that the interest is there for us. I went to church yesterday and the preacher said something that made me think of you—Lazarus had his sores and evil things in this world, and perhaps he deserved them, but he somehow earned good things in the other world and he got them also.

Miss Hughes and I are coming to see you next visiting day. I shall be so glad to see you again—so glad!

Until then,

SARAH.

DEAR FATHER:

If ever I needed the cheerfulness of the Emerald Isle folk it was after my visit to you. That dreadful place! And you have lived there six years,—it makes

me choke and have the funny hurt in my throat like I had when I first discovered the presence of a conscience. The only thing makes the matter bearable is the knowledge that in several more years you'll be out, counting the time off for good behavior. You'll be free, free! The first thing you must do is come to Sunset Mountain and stand on the summit, then you'll know you are free at last. I pitied the chewink in his cage at the Zoo—what do you think I feel for you! Of course, the worst is over. Three years are not very many compared with the six you have spent there already. See, I can find some little crumb of comfort. I knew I would if I dug deep enough. It took me ten minutes to think of that but I have Irish ingenuity and kept at it.

Father, won't you tell me about my mother? I want so to know who she was and whether she has any people. Of course I'm happy here, probably happier than I should be with her relatives, but I am always wondering who I am, if I have any aunts, uncles, cousins and the like. I think you said once that your people didn't like my mother. If that is so I'd like to have a chance to tell them what I think of them! Perhaps it's a case of "better let sleeping dogs lie" and I might be sorry if I discovered my family. Aunts and cousins are interfering things, at any rate, so I don't care if I have any or not—sour grapes!

Speaking of grapes, we have wild ones on our mountain now and they are fine. There's an old stone wall in one of the fields near the house and it's covered with grapes, those little ones that smell as good as they taste. There are bittersweet berries on that same wall and every fall we pick them and have them in the house all winter. I asked Miss Hughes where they got such a mixed name

—sounds like an Irishman named them. She said if you chew the root it will be bitter at first, then change to a sweetish taste. And she added that life is very often like that. I say the world missed a good priest, preacher or rabbi when Miss Hughes was born a woman. She can take the homeliest thing and read a lesson that you'll like and remember.

But I am wondering what sweetness even she could discover in an experience I had an hour ago. Miss Hughes went to the city and Miss Mary and I were left in charge. Early in the afternoon a big car came round the driveway and a woman, fine as her car, stepped out. It was up to me to find out what she wanted.

Oh, she had a honeyed voice! "May I see the matron, please?"

I told her Miss Hughes was out and would not return for several hours but I'd be glad to be of service.

"You are employed here?" she looked at me closely and I put on my grandest front and told her I was, that I was an assistant—of course I didn't tell her it was in the kitchen! Was afraid she would be permanently shocked if she knew she were talking with one of the cooks.

She informed me that she was interested in child welfare and juvenile court reform and was gathering data for a book on the subject, so it would be a great favor if I should be kind enough to supply her with some information of the work being done in that reformatory.

I assured her I was "willing as Barkus" and we started off on a tour of the place. Thank goodness I look older than I am, else she would have questioned me more closely.

I led the haughty lady about in the big building, ex-

plained the work, the routine, while she made notes in a leather bound book that must have cost more than a Bible. "The girls do all the work—splendid for them, that takes some of the villainy from them, at least suppresses it for a time"—she added her comments on what I told her as she wrote the information in the little book. "They clean, sew, cook, bake, wash and iron—what capital servants they should become! Really, my dear, that is about all they can hope to become. No position of trust will ever be open for reformatory girls. Um, the hall bears evidence of indefatigable labor." She looked at the big hall, which was always polished until it shone like glass, then back to her notes once more. "Go to school until they reach the eighth grade—really more than they need. My dear, education of incorrigibles merely tends to increase their power for evil. They are taught basketry, sewing, and spend much spare time outdoors studying flowers and birds. *My dear*, what a mistake! I should say that is a case of 'Pearls before swine.' Surely they do not appreciate the glories of nature, their depraved souls are sunken too low for that. It is a great pity."

"Yes, it is a pity," I spoke up. The woman looked up from her leather bound book and her notes about juvenile reform. My face must have looked about as peaceful as a thunder cloud. "It is a pity," I repeated, "a pity that in all this great big world with its thousands of churches and people who frequent them there are so few who have one spark of sympathy for the girls who live in reformatories. We haven't grown very far above those people who wanted to stone the sinner long ago, have we? Of course you have read Tennyson's 'Maud' but perhaps you have forgotten those wonderful lines:

“ ‘ Ah yet, we cannot be kind to each other here for an hour;
 We whisper, and hint, and chuckle, and grin at a brother's shame;
 However we brave it out, we men are a little breed.’ ”

What right has one person to judge another? How can we know the evil influence that wrought the havoc in the life of any one of these girls? Are not you and I, and the whole race, bound by infirmity and at times yielding to evil? Would you want your entire life, all its action, thoughts, words, photographed and displayed to the world? Is there any mortal under the sky who has not some indiscretions or faults or weakness they want to hide from the gaze of the curious and the gossiping? We don't like to admit it, it is so much more comfortable to our minds to be able to feel above the common run of humanity, but I wonder—I wonder ——”

“ My dear,” the woman said wonderingly, “ what peculiar ideas you harbor! It is unusual for a young girl to have that view, but you have not lived long enough to have an opinion of value to us. A sheltered, unsophisticated girl like you can't have any possible idea of the evil in the world. When you are older and have seen more of life ——”

I laughed, rude as it was. I had to laugh! Then I explained, “ *I have seen* life, in the raw, madam, with the varnish all licked off like a child's toy.”

“ You must have had a strange education. May I ask the name of your college? ”

“ The Slums and Reformatory,” I answered, like I was naming some highfalutin' thousand-dollars-a-year select school for girls.

She surveyed me through her glasses as though I

were speaking Hindustan. "I don't think I understand."

"No, you don't," I agreed heartily. "Neither do you understand any other reformatory girls. What can you know about Red Rose Court and worse places! Have you ever lived in the slums? I am one of the girls who can never hold a position of trust, a REFORMATORY GIRL!"

She moved away from me as though afraid to breathe the same pestilential air. "I thought, I understood—you gave me the impression you were employed here."

"I am. But I was committed here six years ago as an inmate. Now I have been appointed assistant in the kitchen." I faced her as though I were addressing a regiment of soldiers and I purposely used slang—"You take it from me, there's more in the hearts of these girls than wickedness. Some of them are headed straight for the dogs and nothing this side of the blue sky can stop them, but some of them still have a glimmer of refinement, some spark of divine faith, that will help them to conquer themselves and crawl from the pit of darkness to the light. But you would push them back, wouldn't you? I'm thinking that darkness where there is going to be so much wailing and gnashing of teeth will hold some who were not in a reformatory. But I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to interrupt your valuable taking of notes about juvenile reform. Is there anything more I could tell you about this school?"

She swept her lofty eyes over me as though I were a speck of dust to be brushed aside. I could see that my eloquence was wasted upon her. "No, I thank you," came the cold reply. "I have all the essential information. Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon," I answered back, like I was one

of those stiff-necked butlers you read about in English books. Then I bowed her out. I shut the door and did a sailor's hornpipe and told myself I bet I gave her something in her bean to think about. But I'm wondering now whether I really did. She's out to learn the worst about us. Her taking notes about reform—it's like the whiskered rabbi who gave a beggar a quarter for a shave and the latter shoved the money back and said, "Keep it yourself, boob, you need it worse than I do."

You called me your ray of sunshine when I was there to see you. How I wish I could be something nice like that for you! Won't you think about the thing I asked you to do for me—tell me about my mother and relatives? Guess relatives are like a husband, you are never happy till you get one and after that you often wish you had been satisfied without. But I'll take a chance.

With love,

SARAH.

DEAR FATHER:

What you told me about my mother made me happy, but I knew without being told that she was the dearest person on the earth. I am sorry she had no people, for that leaves me with as many cousins as I had before you told me about her, unless there are some of your folks still living. It would be so exciting to have a new family suddenly to get acquainted with. Are you an orphan too? It would be too bad if I had no one on either side of the house to be proud of me when I become famous as I am destined to do. But I suppose I could very easily find a family then, some distant cousins.

Miss Hughes and I went to Red Rose Court the day

before Christmas to take some presents. Oh, father, how could we ever live there? The squalor and pity of it! Poor Mrs. Maloney has a second husband and the ninth baby and is as jolly as ever. How she can be I don't see; she deserves a better place than Red Rose Court. We saw a ragged little girl sitting out on the cold curb with a baby in her arms and I shut my eyes and saw myself six years ago. I have been fortunate, I saw that when we went back to that dreadful place. Schlitzbergers moved to the country so I suppose Jakey is happy. But there are always others to take the place of those who leave. I suppose Red Rose Court will stay as it is forever, the same dirty place with miserable people in it. If some persons cleaned it up would it stay cleaned? It made me heart sick. I saw what I escaped. And surely, even the place you have been these years is not worse than that old home of ours. But home is too fine a word—hovel!

I was glad to get back to our mountain. We went out for our Christmas greens that same day so I could get the taste of Red Rose Court out of my mouth. I wish I could paint Sunset Mountain as it was then, with the white snow upon it, the lovely filigree on the twigs and weeds, the beauty of the unsullied white flakes as they cover everything in sight. It makes you want to forget there is any place as unlovely as Red Rose Court.

We donned sweaters, caps and mittens and started out. In the field beyond the daisy one there are many cedar and pine trees and there we cut our greens, away from the road where the stumps won't be eyesores. Among so many fine trees it was difficult to select those we liked best but after fussing we decided and started to saw. Back and forth went the saw in the hands of some of the

oldest girls, eating into the pungent wood of the cedar or the fragrant heart of the pine. There came excited cries to clear the path, the trees swayed, and as we shouted and danced, they fell to the snowy ground. As each tree fell eager hands tugged at it and dragged it to the edge of the field.

"Oh, look at that crooked little cedar," exclaimed one of the girls and pointed to a tree that had grown in a tangle of encroaching branches so that it was forced to curve and grow bent.

"Yes," some of Miss Hughes' philosophy cropped out, "it is crooked, but it had a hard time to grow even as straight as it has. See that big cedar that is perfect, that had nothing to interfere with it, to make it go in the wrong direction, but this poor little one was almost choked to death."

"Ah, poor little tree," cried the girls, quick to pity. Perhaps they felt an intuitive sympathy for the struggling inhabitant of the woods, saw their own lives symbolized by it. "Let's take it home and trim it up for Christmas," suggested one.

So we cut down the crooked little cedar and placed it with the others. Then we cut pine branches, scratched away the snow and pulled up trailing crowfoot until yards of it lay in a heap near the other greens.

"Now," I cried, "all ready for the homeward march!" If I could paint I'd do a masterpiece, Bringing in the Christmas Greens. It was a picture. Each tree was partly lifted, partly dragged, along in the snowy field. Some of the girls had their arms filled with pine boughs, others trailed the crowfoot, and the sunset glow came up and tinged us all with gold. I looked at the girls, their faces were ruddy as their crimson sweaters and caps.

We worked all evening putting the trees and greens into place in the big sewing room. Miss Hughes and Miss Mary enjoyed it as much as we did. The teacher had gone home for the holidays, but we promised to leave the decorations so she can see them. What fun we had decorating the trees! Pink and white popcorn Miss Mary helped us pop and sugar and string, paper ornaments the teacher taught us to make, a few balls and the like left over from previous trees, and the dear little angel Miss Hughes bought for the top branch. On the crooked little cedar we hung our gifts for each other. I bet Miss Hughes received no less than two dozen pen wipers made from braided raffia and cloth—she need never again wipe a pen on her petticoat! But the girls' gifts to her, crude and home-made though they were, told her so eloquently of their regard for her that it brought tears to her eyes. Dear Miss Hughes, she is the nearest thing I know to a mother. If a real mother could bring greater joy to me then I'd have to enlarge my heart to hold it all. Miss Hughes and Miss Mary gave each girl a box of candy and if you had ever been a girl with a sweet tooth and shut in a place where never a snitch of candy reached you then you could know how every girl shouted at the gift. Everybody seemed to have the Christmas spirit. I had a lovely day with the rest, but that night as I left the school-room after prayers and sat a while in the sitting-room with Miss Hughes and Miss Mary—I'm privileged now, being an employee—I felt depressed, all the Irish cheerfulness drowned in unhappiness.

"Sarah, aren't you happy?" Miss Hughes asked me.

"Why ——" I tried to lie, but I couldn't do it when she looked at me. Instead I had to bite my lips to keep the tears back. Seemed like I was all teary and sobby, a

whole ocean inside of me wanting to get spilled. "Oh," I said after a little, "how can I be really happy? You are lovely to me, the girls, too—everybody! Don't think I'm ungrateful for all you have done and are doing for me, but I seem to always want more, just one thing more. I'm wanting a home, a real home, with my own people in it to love me and fix me a tree, even if it's the meanest tree in the world, and to give me presents on Christmas though a kiss were all they could afford to give. It's that I'm wanting. And I guess it's that I'll never get."

Miss Hughes smiled, then was serious and dear. "Never's a long time, Sarah, a long, long time. But I think you'll get all those things some day. A home is different from an institution, God bless us, yes!" I think she must have been thinking of her own childhood for her eyes were starry when she looked at me again.

"Sarah, you have a right to know whether you have any other relatives besides your father. You are a young lady now, and it is not right to keep you here if you have people who would be glad to have you. You were made for a home, a happy home with all its love. If your father should die without telling you just who you are and where you come from it would haunt you all your days; there would be that mystery to darken your life. I suppose your father has never thought of it from that angle. I am going to see him and talk it over." So, father, when Miss Hughes comes to see you, please listen to her. She's a pretty good arguer, though. Bet she could sell an Eskimo a fan if she set out to do it. But, father, be ready for her and do as she asks you. Let it be my Christmas present from my father. If I don't like my relatives after I have them trust me to shake the dust of them

from my feet. Perhaps they would be glad to have me live with them and know how to act in a real home, then when you come out to me and we have that little home together I'll know just how to do. Please, please!

With love,

SARAH (poor lonely girl without a home. Pity the homeless).

CHAPTER VII

REVELATIONS OF SARAH'S FATHER

DEAR SARAH :

Your last letter woke me up. It is your right to know who and where your people are. Heaven knows I have sinned enough against you without adding another black mark. All these years I have kept the thing from you, but I am going to tell you the names and addresses of your aunts and grandfather. Once, long ago, I was a boy who went to Sunday school and there I learned about Pilate who was going to commit a crime and washed his hands first, hoping to keep the stain of it from him, but all the water in the world couldn't keep his hands clean when he sinned. So I have tried to keep you in ignorance, hoping that I might escape some of the condemnation I deserve, but I see now that it is only right to tell you. Then you have the privilege of ignoring the revelation and forgetting all about your relatives or of going to them and see what manner of people you have.

I told you the truth when I said your mother was an orphan and has not, to my knowledge, one relative near enough to be called that. She lost her parents at an early age, was taken care of—if you can dignify it by that phrase—by a distant cousin, shoved into the world upon her own resources at fourteen. After a checkered career, checkered only in variety of experiences, not with

sin, she went on the stage. She had a natural talent for dancing and singing; anything that rhymed appealed to her. That is where you get your love for music and poetry, I suppose.

She was Irish, pure and sweet as a daisy, and when I met her—but I am getting ahead of my story. You want to know about me—I am Pennsylvania Dutch. That means nothing to you, for there are no settlements of them in the part of the country where you live, but briefly: there are in Pennsylvania some sections of country where the majority of the inhabitants cling to a quaint old dialect, half English, partly German, the remainder hodge-podge—Swiss, Dutch—I don't know just what. It's a queer language and their English is usually flavored with its accent, idioms, expressions, and substitution of w for v and d for t, so that it is easy to distinguish the Pennsylvania Dutch, especially to those who have lived in that section. But many of them speak English perfectly these days; education, reading, study, have brought them what their grandparents never had. Among the Pennsylvania Dutch are numerous religious sects called plain people. They are called that because their religion calls for a distinctive form of dress, extremely plain and not conforming to the fashions and vanities of the world. These plain people are called Mennonites, Amish, River Brethren, Brethren, and a half dozen similar names. There are some points of difference but all are characterized by plainness of dressing and living, avoidance of all frivolity and worldliness, such as dancing, card playing, attendance at theatres or motion pictures.

I was born and raised in such a peaceful atmosphere. My mother, father, aunts, grandparents, cousins, and two sisters were Mennonites, the women wearing the plain

garb something like the Quakers' of whom you must have studied in school, and the men also dressed in plain suits and broad-brimmed hats to distinguish them from the worldly.

My mother—I want to say it now so you won't ever forget it—my mother was the dearest mother in the world! If she had lived—well, ever since Adam we like to shift the blame on other shoulders, but I am sure that if she had lived your life and mine would have been vastly different.

I had a boyhood busy, happy, care-free, like many other children in that section of the country. My father owned a big hardware store and was reputed to be "well-off," as they say up there. Surely I had many good times, some healthy exercise working, and no more troubles than most boys. My father was a quiet, sober man. I can't remember seeing him play with his children or bouncing them on his knees. But he was good to us, provided us with comforts and never objected to buying books or anything necessary for school-work. Besides being serious he was strict as a judge when it came to keeping the Sabbath, attending church service, dealing fairly with neighbors, helping people in trouble. There was no possible way of escaping his dictates. Other boys I knew fooled their fathers sometimes and managed to get out of doing chores or going to church, but I never could do that with mine. Sunday was the Lord's Day and he ordered it kept as he thought it should be and we kept it so. We could spend the odd hours of it in quiet conversation, serious reading or visiting in families where he knew the holiness of the day would be observed. I sat during many long hours in the Mennonite church, my feet swinging, my back tired from the hard wooden benches—

Mennonites leave cushioned pews for the easy-going Christians.

Narrow, uncompromising as father was in religious matters, he was liberal enough in others. When I asked him to send me to school so I could become a trained mechanic he consented without any arguments. He'd educate me and after I earned money I could pay it back so that my sisters might fare as well as I. I went off to Philadelphia to school, a happy young man, looking forward to a bright future, a useful life of which my parents would be proud.

The last year of my stay in the city I met your mother. She was, as I told you, an actress. Now, all my life I had been taught that absolutely everything connected with the stage and footlights was utterly wrong, evil, to be shunned by all except the wicked and depraved who did not care for the safety of their souls. My parents' religion strictly forbids attendance at theatres or dances. All that had been drummed into my brain from the cradle but when I met your mother at a boarding-house where she was respected and loved, something seemed to call to me, something stronger than the teachings and warnings of my father, even stronger than the pleadings of my mother. I was of another generation from the old folks in the little town up-state. My few years in the city had taught me to smile in amusement at some of the standards set up there, and I had come to the conclusion that surely some of the theatrical profession must be good. So when I found myself in love with your mother—her name was Sarah, too—and learned to my delight that she had the same feeling for me, I was as happy as though she had been a girl from home in a plain Mennonite dress. Of course, I was a bit troubled about the opinion

of my people, but never for one minute was I ready to sacrifice our happiness for the prejudices of father or mother. For a time we kept our love secret. I had some foreboding of what my father would say, but I hoped, as lovers always do, that his objections would be driven away when he met Sarah.

When my course of study was completed I went home, ready to tell all about my happiness and waiting to be asked to bring to them the girl I had chosen. The first day father called me to the parlor for a talk. That was unusual for him, for he was not a talkative man. I can see him now with his big frame in the plain gray Mennonite suit, his hair parted, his face strong as the painting of a prophet, a glint of hardness, sternness, righteousness, in his eyes.

"Jeremiah,"—he never shortened the name—"now you are done school and ready to earn your own living; your mother and I talked it over and we hope you will find you some nice Mennonite girl to marry and then settle down and be a man. We hope you can find it in your heart to come in the church. Your sisters done so a'ready but you say you ain't ready. But now, surely, Jeremiah, when you get grown up to a man you can take your place with the others in the family. All your cousins went in the Mennonite church last fall a'ready and you still hang back. I don't believe forcing children to such things, but I thought mebbe if I say something it will help you to see the light. Getting a nice Mennonite girl for wife will help you keep in the right way. If you want to marry and settle down somewhere out of Fairview we don't care so much. I can set you up in business or loan you money for a start. Mebbe Lancaster or Lebanon would be more for you than this little town. Just so you

don't go too far away for your mom is growing older every day and you being the only boy she has her heart set on your staying pretty close. Come now, Jeremiah," a smile wrinkled the corners of his eyes, "haven't you seen yet a nice Mennonite girl you want to marry?"

I thought of Sarah, dancing, playing a joyous part behind the footlights and my courage oozed away like water through the fingers. Perhaps I groaned, for father looked at me with eyes I never could deceive and asked, "You found the girl in the city?"

I nodded, then rose and asserted myself. "Father, I found the girl! I am going to marry her. All I need is your consent and mother's and an invitation to bring her here for you to meet. You'll love her, she's a dear, sweet girl. All she wants is a chance to win your love, to get acquainted, and you can't help liking her."

"Who is she?" Father rarely showed excitement.

"Sarah Galleghar. She's lovely, but all her life has been so hard. She's absolutely alone in the world, had to hoe her own row since she was fourteen."

"What does she work?"

"She's an actress."

Well, if I had uttered the most depraved word in the whole language he could not have looked at me with a greater expression of horror. It left him speechless for a minute. Then he rose, his mighty body seemed afire with passion and I never heard, before or since, words that seemed to burn like his. "Jeremiah," he thundered, "are you a son of mine? You dare to stand down there and tell me that you love an actress—a low-down dancing fool that knows nothing but wickedness?"

"Father!" I tried to stop him but he went on ruthlessly.

"You—Jeremiah Burkhart, with your mother wearing a plain dress and white cap and a father that had always tried to show his children the straight and narrow way—you, my own flesh and blood, to know, even to *know* an actress, and then to say you love her and want to marry her! I wonder the Lord don't strike you dumb! I wonder you stop to marry her—they don't often bother doing that." Oh, father could be withering in his wrath and scorn!

But some of the Burkhart fire dwelt in me. He went too far when he said such things about the girl I loved and knew to be pure. I stepped before him and shook my fist in his livid face. "You say another word against that girl and I'll, by heaven, I'll ——"

"Go on," he dared me. "To strike me would be so much kinder than to tell me you want to marry an actress."

I sank into a chair. I was weak, as always, quick to dare, but lacking courage to keep up the fight. "She's as good as any girl in Lancaster County," I blurted, "as good as any Mennonite girl or any other. I know she is! You have no right to condemn her without knowing her or even meeting her."

My father's anger had cooled by that time and he looked at me with something like pity for my weakness. "Jeremiah," he said slowly, "you are going in this thing with your eyes shut. You do not stop to think what it will mean to bring a woman like that here, to have her be a sister to your sisters, a daughter to your mother. You have been taught something about the evil in the world, and I thought your time spent in the big city would show you how much better it is to forsake the vanities of the wicked. But you must know that what is wrong can't

ever be called right and then be right because it is called so. Dancing and such things are the work of the devil, and woe to those who follow after the darkness! You mind what dreadful things happened because that girl danced before Herod. What good has ever come out of dancing? Would you want your sisters to marry men who danced and acted on the stage?"

"If they were as good and fine as Sarah, yes!"

He shook his head. "What have I done to have a son like you?" The next moment his wrath flamed again. "I tell you," he thundered, "I'd rather bury you than see you married to a woman like that, an actress, a dancer! A disgrace you'll be to the whole freundschaft! There never was a Burkhart done a thing like that! All I got to say is that she'll never sit at my table! I'll have none of her kind for my daughter!"

"You don't believe in eating with publicans and sinners?" I sneered.

"No. Not unless they repent of their wickedness and become converted," he replied unflinchingly. "Your mother and I will pray that she may do that."

"Save your breath," I told him. "I don't want Sarah to turn Mennonite." I thought of her, pretty, liking nice clothes, her toes tingling at every strain of music—could they make a Quaker-like little Mennonite of her? Never!

"I am going to marry her just as she is!" I announced, "and be proud to do so!" I delivered my ultimatum and left my father. He refrained from replying; words must have failed him once more as he pondered upon the heretical sayings and contemplated downward step of his son.

My mother said less, nothing cruel or stinging, but I read horror and unhappiness on her face when I met her later. Father had told her all the sorrowful tale, embel-

lished, I suppose, with his opinion of the wretched matter. She felt keenly the disgrace I was going to bring upon them.

"Jerry," she made the name soft and sweet as she had always done, and as I looked into her face with its halo of white Mennonite cap and read the sorrow in her heart, I would have given up anything in the world to please her except the one thing she wanted me to—the girl I loved. She took my face between her hands as she had so often done when I was a child and she wanted to impress something upon me or sought to question me. "Jerry," she said sadly, "you must see that a girl like that is not for you, she is of another world. Can't you forget her and find some nice plain girl from Fairview or near here?"

"I can't, mother. I love her and what right has anybody to come between us? She's such a sweet, frail thing; never had anybody really care for her, and she has kept straight in surroundings that many of the good girls from the country would have found too much for them. I can't give her up."

My mother looked at me for a while, then she must have read my very heart. She dropped her hands from my cheeks and laid them on my shoulders. "Jerry," she said, and I can hear her yet, "Jerry, I see you mean it. It is beyond our power to change things and perhaps you are right when you say no person has a right to come between you. If that's the way you care for her and she for you you can't do anything but get married. We'll pray the Lord to change her heart and make her one of us. Whoever you marry I'll love, Jerry. She'll be my daughter. Poor child, not to know a mother's love and care—poor girl—I'll try to make it up to her."

I remember I cried then and she comforted me, though

I felt that the world was once more a good place. But when my fit of weeping was over I thought of father. "Father ——" I said to her.

"Yes, Jerry, your father is so strong in his belief that it will be hard to make him see. But we'll hope that in time he will think of her as a daughter. Perhaps we can show the light to the poor girl."

But father did not see the light. He was firm and frank. "No play-actress and dancer, except a converted one, comes in my house!" was the final verdict of the big man who was so good himself in his narrow way that he had no patience with offenders. "If you marry her you'll be a disgrace to the family, to the whole town, forever!"

I said good-bye to mother and went back to the city and several days later I married the woman I loved. Only after we were married did I tell her about my father's attitude, for I was afraid if she knew it before she would think it her duty to give me up. She was hurt, poor girl, poor motherless girl who had been buffeted about like a leaf in the storm and thought she had found a safe place at last, only to discover that she was unwelcome in the family. She couldn't understand the attitude of the people who are opposed to her profession, she was so sure that her life had been as blameless as a baby's and could not fathom why any man should sit in judgment upon her. But there was a haughtiness about her, too, for all her childlikeness, and she would not go to my home to meet my mother. "I can't bear being pointed at and called bad, or to be ordered out of the house. That would be so much harder than to stay away. We'll just cling together and long as you like me I'll manage to get along," she said in her Irish teasing way. "But ask your

mother to come make us a visit. I know I'll love her like me own mother, so ask her soon, Jerry. I want to thank her for you."

But my mother, partly from worry, I suppose, but chiefly from a long-standing trouble, was taken suddenly ill and before I could get to her she died. Your mother would not go back with me then, for she said they would make her feel like a murderess, so I went alone. I didn't get a cordial welcome. My father would not tell me that I was the cause of my mother's death, but he acted it and I felt it burning in his eyes every time he looked at me. He was a broken man but he hid it, as men of his nature do, by gruffness and a greater drawing within himself. I went back to the city, knowing that my chances for forgiveness were scantier than ever. My two sisters kept house for him and I knew they did not relish having me around. Sybilla was just like father and told me what she thought of my disgraceful actions, but Mary, bless her heart, was like mother, and though she did not say much I saw she was sorry for me and would have helped me if she could.

"I am done with you for good," my father said to me as I came away from my home after my mother was laid away in the pretty little cemetery where the wild strawberries grow and the graveyard pinks carpet the whole place in the spring. I took him at his word and went back to my wife. We moved to New Jersey, getting out of touch completely with the little Pennsylvania Dutch town where I was born and had lived so many years. There were few in the place who cared for me or dared show it if they did. My old friends and relatives felt that I was a disgrace, gone to the bad, married an actress, broke my mother's heart, gone against my father's wishes,

thrown away my chances for a bright future as though they were so many sticks, dragged the good name of Burkhart down in the mud—what greater criminal could I be?

So the last cords with the old home were broken when my mother died. Your mother made it up to me so far as anything like that can be made up. She and I were happy. I worked for her and she kept the home like a new pin. It was fun to watch her, see her enjoy every little bit of the home life. I never regretted my marriage to her. She was all that I had hoped for, and more—sweet, unspoiled. When you came our little home became a Paradise. You were so like her, laughing, sunny, smiling. As soon as you walked you tripped about like a dancer and sang like the birds. Your mother took such great joy in you, sewed pretty things, taught you to sing, sang you to sleep—I have often been sorry that you could not remember those days.

When you were two years old she died. Child, it doesn't take long to write that line, but oh, what it meant to me! The world went black for me. What was left? Could I go back to the old town where my sisters and father lived and where my fancied disgrace was still remembered? Could I remain in the big city and face life alone, with only you to comfort me? I was almost mad, altogether, I think, for a time. I sold everything, and started off with you on my arm. I think I intended to take you to my sisters and then disappear, wander to the ends of the earth. We tramped on a country road. I remember as in a dream. We must have gone miles, you on my arm and walking at times until you said you were too tired. We rested along the road, then off again, not knowing just where we were going. I have recollections

of stopping at a farmhouse and getting milk, and once a man thought I was a kidnapper, but you saved me by telling that I was your very own daddy and we were going to aunties and grandfather far away. After a while we came to the edge of a city, and I think I must have been thoroughly unbalanced or fevered, for we stumbled along—my mind went blank and I remembered nothing more until I came to in a little room. A woman brought you in to me and you were so glad I woke up that you cried and kissed me. How like your mother you have always been! The woman said I had fallen at her door and you cried and brought them out. She was a widow and lived with her mother in a poor but respectable section of a big city in New Jersey.

I didn't care to get well, but after several months I was all right again. Then a dullness, like sleep, seemed to be upon my spirit. I hadn't enough ambition to get out and go on with you. We might as well stay where we were for a while until I felt better able to face the condemning glances of the people in the little town back home. The two women were kind to us, took fine care of you while I dragged out to work, and we boarded with them for several years. I knew it were better to take you to your aunts, but somehow I could never bear the thought of losing you. It was like putting from me the last thing left of your adored mother. Then the mother of the young woman died and I knew that we would have to go unless I married the daughter. I did it, God forgive me, for I married her when I had not one shred of love to give her. But I got all the punishment I deserved, for she soon made it plain that she cared for me only as I earned money. She spent it faster than I could bring it home, but I was married to her and after that I could not

go back home. So we stayed on, going from bad to worse, moving from one neighborhood to another not quite so clean and nice, until at last in desperation we landed in Red Rose Court. One day she brought out a counterfeiter's outfit, left in the house by some one who had to make a hasty getaway, I suppose. I fooled with the thing just in fun at first, then when I saw what I could do with it it got me. I always was handy with tinkering and when it brought me money so like the real that it fooled most everybody, I let myself spend more and more time in that little room back of the closet; a mania seized me, I didn't care how you lived, what you did or how you fared, just to make money, real money out of nothing, the fascination of it got into my blood and I waved aside all conscience and pride and gave myself up to the violation of the law. But the money didn't do me any good; it went like the real coins, through your stepmother's fingers. She soon showed her real self. The kind, pitying woman was gone and she drank, neglected the house and would have been cruel to you if she had not feared me on that point. Then one day I woke up to my better nature once more. I saw my hideous sins as though they were painted on a fifty feet canvas. I wanted to turn over a new leaf, get away from that awful Red Rose Court, go to a farm and begin life all over again. You should have your chance, be raised more like your mother would want you to be. You know the rest, how my plans went wrong. I was arrested and sent here and you to a reformatory. Oh, I am paying the penalty the state demands for transgression of the law, but I am paying more than that. Every day is one of torture, for I can't put from me the memory of your mother and the white-capped face of my own sainted one.

How I have fallen from the standard they thought I would uphold! Remorse—remorse—can any physical punishment, any deprivation of freedom or comfort be half so hard to bear as remorse that eats into the heart and burns and cannot be relieved!

Now you know the whole black story. I can't blame any one for my sins except my own weakness and lack of strength to stand against the storm. But if it is in my power to restore you to what you should have had all your life, a home, I am willing and glad to do it. My father and sisters are still living. The warden looked it up for me. In the little town of Fairview, in Lancaster County, they are living in the big old house where I was born and where I lived my boyhood. There is your home and there you will find your people. They are different from the people you know, perhaps they will not be glad to have you, but I know their sense of justice is so strong that in duty's name you will find a good home with them. I think I shall be tortured less with remorse if I know you are safe with them. Do as you please about going to them, and if you can forgive me for depriving you of all I did it will be more than I deserve. If you denounce me for my weakness it will be my due. Many of the people who live in places like Red Rose Court know no better, have had no chance to gain better things, but after you see my home in Fairview and meet the good, though odd, people there, you will see just how far I fell when I went to the slums. Sometimes I think it must have been an evil dream, but I guess it has all been only too true. I'm afraid to die and meet your mother after the way I dragged you to Red Rose Court and neglected you. But you must be like her, for the evil of the place did not seem to touch you.

However, my wrong to you is not lessened by the fact that you kept right through the dreadful experience of that place and the reformatory. My conscience worries me day and night; only when I know you are happy in the home of my people will I feel some relief. I should have sent you back to them long ago, when I was sent here. Then you would have been spared the stigma of these six years in a reformatory. But I couldn't bear to have you go to them. Now I see my mistake, one more in a long life of them. Seems like the only right thing I ever did was to marry your mother. That is one thing I have never regretted. Now you know the story. Forgive if you can

YOUR FATHER.

Sarah dropped the letter into her lap. Her gray eyes were fixed on space, vagrant, dreaming. "Poor father," she murmured, "poor mother, poor me! Oh," she clasped the closely written sheets against her heart, "he wronged himself infinitely more than he wronged me. Poor father hasn't been an angel, but I think his people have some of that to account for. They did not understand. His mother was the only one who tried to be broad-minded and kind to him. The rest were, and I dare say still are, like the woman who came to the reformatory to take notes on juvenile reform. They must be cold, hard, their minds fixed on one standard. I'm going to Fairview to my father's people and stay a while just to show them what mean little hypocrites they are! But I must write to daddy at once—poor old shipwrecked daddy! He loved my mother and was true to her though it cost him everything else he cared for in the world. For that I can forgive him all that has happened."

DEAR FATHER:

If there is anything for me to forgive you I did it so long ago that I clean forgot all about it, so don't you worry about that! Why, Red Rose Court didn't hurt me a bit! I learned much there and it gave me a chance to see how poor people live. Now when I fall heir to the Burkhart fortune—I take it for granted there is one, for there always is in cases like this—I shall know how to appreciate it properly. Why, without my experience there I'd never held the Maloney baby and loved it or wheeled it home from the park while its soul went flying back to heaven! And I should never have learned that there are perfectly good shoes, dresses, flowers and so forth in the ash cans of the wealthy. Oh, father, I may sound frivolous but I mean every word I say. I do forgive you anything, everything! I am glad you told me about Fairview and my relatives. To think that I really have a grandfather and two aunts and possibly a stack of cousins after I thought I was almost alone in the world is mighty strange and makes me feel that, after all, I wasn't picked out of a garbage can. So I am going to Fairview, without telling them that I am coming, else they might go away and I'd find the house locked. No, I'll just drop in on a visit and won't they be surprised! I was going to say *glad*, but I guess that would be expecting too much. Miss Hughes is going to help me get a proper outfit so they won't be ashamed of their new relative. She offered to help me make dresses that are a little different from the eternal blue uniforms of the reformatory. So, sometime in early spring, think of me stopping at that old big house on Main Street, Fairview—seeing *my* people! I shall write to you and let you know how many parties and receptions they have in *my* honor.

But, seriously, father, I am eager to go, to have, for a time at least, a taste of a real home. Do you know that in all my life, since I can remember, I have not lived in one—Red Rose Court doesn't count. Now I want a Christmas tree, an Easter nest, a party, and all the trimmings. If they are not glad to see me come, then, as Mrs. Maloney used to say, they'll be glad to see me go.

With love,

SARAH.

CHAPTER VIII

LANCASTER COUNTY

AFTER a long, bitter winter April smiled upon Lancaster County. The gray succession of bleak days ended and spring came with a rush. It blew fresh across the mountains where the tall trees stood in serried ranks, it ran smilingly along the meadows and fields of the valley until every spot rejoiced in the promise of new beauty, new activities, new growth and every woodland nook was dappled with flowers and dimpled with life. The trees, quickened, unfolded tassel and leaf; the flowers sprung up with miraculous haste; the erstwhile doubting ones who had asked querulously, "Will spring never come?" rejoiced in the fulfilment of the promise, "While the earth remaineth . . . summer and winter . . . shall not cease."

When Sarah Burkhart reached Lancaster County the warmth and promise of the spring enwrapped it like a garment. It had been a slow journey but to the girl who had lived in so small a circle each hour of the two hundred miles from Sunset Mountain to Fairview was fraught with interest. Older, blasé travelers complained of the frequent stops on the last lap of the trip, as though fifteen stations in thirty-two miles were an outrage, but Sarah laughed at them and wished the train would stop oftener, for was she not in her own father's country and eager to see as much of it as possible! Yet she rose with alacrity when the train man cried, "Fairview!" Here, at last, was her home—the home of her people!

A kind conductor helped her off the train with her baggage and answered her smile with one equally sincere, while he wondered who might be the radiant young creature who put into her "Thank you" so much feeling.

Sarah Burkhart at eighteen was worthy of a second glance. Of medium height, slender and vibrant as a sapling of the woods, she gave one the impression of conserved strength, unbounded energy. Her six years on the mountain had done wonders for her, but not miracles. She still had the same little turned-up nose and the freckles that had brought upon her so many fights in Red Rose Court when spoken of disparagingly. But her hair was black as ever and her gray eyes held depths as still and lovely as a mountain stream. She still had her childhood's way of narrowing her lids in a scrutinizing gaze when doubtful or perplexed, but at other times her eyes, wide open as a Madonna's, had all the innocence of a child's. As she stood on the little platform at Fairview and watched the train depart, who would have dreamed that the slim young girl had lived in the slums of a great city and subsequently spent six years in a reformatory?

As she stood there she was thinking of Miss Hughes. How kind she had been, how more than kind! It had been Miss Hughes who kept her on the mountain and away from slavish labor in the home of some want-to-be aristocrat who shied from paying proper servants. It had been Miss Hughes who taught, loved and helped the harum-scarum Sade of Red Rose Court how to act like a lady, as the child expressed it in those first days away from her father. Then later it was Miss Hughes who arranged for new clothes and cajoled the Trustees into buying for Sarah an outfit proper for her going back to the home of her father's people. And it was Miss Hughes

who found out about the trains, took her to the depot, kissed her good-bye and waved a gay farewell as the momentous journey was begun.

Sarah felt elated at her successful carrying out of the trip. "Why," she thought happily, "I bet I could travel all the way to California alone! Here I am at last in Fairview and I feel it in my bones that I am going to have an adventure. Wish I had brought Jerry along. But Miss Hughes persuaded me to leave him with her—guess it is the better way, for one girl my relatives don't expect is quite enough, without adding a collie."

The thought set her laughing. At the sound an old man who stood by an older conveyance turned to her and asked, "Miss, was you wantin' to be drove anywheres?"

Sarah looked at the hackman, then at the hack, and suppressed a smile. She did not know that she was looking at the important Transfer, as the residents of Fairview named the hack, important because it carried the mail to and from the depot three times a day and could be called upon to carry passengers to any part of the little town of two thousand inhabitants. She saw merely an odd, closed conveyance which she had no desire to enter and leaning against it, a funny little old man who chewed his gums, wore his trousers hitched to pink suspenders, and turned a wrinkled, smiling face to her.

"No, I think I'll walk, thank you," she told him. "I suppose it isn't very far. Do you know where Jeremiah Burkhart lives?" she asked eagerly.

"Me, well, I guess!" came the swift reply. "Why, I done all his haulin' since I drive the Transfer, for thirty years anyhow, if not more. Ach, be sure I know where he lives at! See that big street across them tracks?"

He pointed to the long shaded street where lindens and horse-chestnuts grew rank along the curb.

"Yes," the girl told him.

"Well, now that's where Jeremiah Burkhart lives at. In that big house, fourth from the corner this-a-way, the one that's set back a piece in the yard and got the two big trees right in the front yard—that's it!"

"Oh, thank you," Sarah said, her heart beating with excitement.

"Don't mention it. But are you a relation of his, mebbe?" The curiosity of the small town person who knows the name and pedigree of every visitor leaped to the front.

"Thank you very much," repeated the girl, seeming not to have heard the question.

"Comin' to visit then, mebbe?" persisted the man.

"I think I can find it all right, thank you," said Sarah as she picked up her bag and started off.

"Jimminy pats, she's close-mouthed! Wonder now if she might be some high-toned relation from the city! Heh, wonder how she'll like old Jerry—must be her first trip here if she don't know where he lives. Wonder how he'll like her, with them stylish duds and pretty face and all—heh, he'll have some job makin' a Mennonite out her if she's some one comin' to stay."

When Sarah reached the iron fence that separated the Burkhart home from the street she stood still a moment. A swift glance up the street showed her that all the houses of the block were set in green terraced yards, back from the fences and hedges. Oh, what a place for a home! The Burkhart place was big, attractive in its old-fashioned plain architecture, and to the girl who had known nothing like it, appeared a veritable mansion.

What a place for Christmas trees, parties and all the delightful occurrences one read of in books. At that moment she realized that dear as the home on the mountain had come to be because of Miss Hughes, it had, nevertheless, been merely an institution. Home—would this lovely old house with its yard and trees and its flowers already bursting into bloom along the side of the walks, be a real home for her? It had been her father's. Here had fallen upon his ears the denunciation of the girl he loved, within those red brick walls had been spoken the bitter words that had made him an outcast from his people. Feelings varied and uncertain were within her as she opened the gate and went up the three sandstone steps that led to the walk and the front porch.

She rang the bell. The door opened and a woman in the garb of a Mennonite stood before her. For a minute Sarah was confused. The plain dress of the woman, the sheer white cap upon her head, surprised her. Then she remembered that her father had mentioned something about some religious sects flourishing among the Pennsylvania Dutch, sects that demanded of their followers some peculiar garb to denote their aloofness from the vanities of the world. Of course, her father's people were members of some such sect.

"What did you want?" The woman's voice was gentle but none too cordial. Here, probably, was another agent for books, aluminum, or something they didn't need.

"Is this the place where Jeremiah Burkhart lives?"

"Why, yes it is. Did you want to see him?"

"Yes, or some other person in his family—I'm his granddaughter."

"His—what?" The woman frowned, then looked puzzled. "I guess you made a mistake, mebbe. He got no granddaughter. He's my pop so I know."

"But he has a granddaughter," repeated Sarah, "I know he has! Didn't he have a son Jeremiah and hasn't that son a daughter? Well, I am that daughter, so that makes him my grandfather."

The woman started, then drew the girl into the hall and closed the door.

"Come in," she said with agitation, "it's for no use to stand on the step and let the neighbors hear it all. Now, what's your name?" She still appeared unconvinced.

"Sarah Burkhart. My father's name is Jeremiah. He told me you lived here, and that you are my people."

"My, my," the woman shook her head sorrowfully, "then Jeremiah had a girl and you're her—my, my, pop, he'll be dreadful put out. But mebbe it's good, for all, you come, for he sits a lot and thinks and I got a notion he often wonders what become of his boy. Now he's gettin' old those things kinda stick to him. I guess you know that your pop went to the bad, married a play-woman, a dancer and that pop told him he was done with him. It broke mom all up and she died soon after. Then me and Sybilla, that's my big sister, started to keep the house for pop and done so since. But we never heard nothin' from Jeremiah since mom died; we thought he was dead long a'ready. Guess he was ashamed to come back after what he done. Pop, he says still that he made his bed now let him lay in it."

"Are you my aunt?" Sarah had to ask something to keep her Irish temper from retorting denial of the woman's accusations about her father.

"Me? Why, yes. I'm your Aunt Mary, then. But

come in the parlor and I'll go tell pop and Sybilla. Just happens pop is home from the store."

"Pop!" she called as she went down the wide hall, "there's somebody in the parlor for you to see."

"For me?" came a man's deep voice. Then the visitor heard whispered conversations and once a raised, "My, my, what a business!" A few minutes later Aunt Mary returned, followed by an older woman and an old man.

Sarah's hands were unconsciously flung out in entreaty for welcome. "Are you my grandfather?" she asked.

Jeremiah Burkhart was not the type to whom one could give an impetuous greeting. Sarah's hands fell to her sides and the two regarded each other in silence for a spell.

She saw a patriarchal, dignified old man, the like of which one finds frequently among the plain sects. His big frame, and massive head, were dependable indices to the strength and ruggedness of his nature. Stern, just, uncompromising, Jeremiah Burkhart was a pillar in his church, a man esteemed in his town, true as steel in business, hating evil and worldliness equally, and so unswerving in his adherence to the straight and narrow way that he had small patience with those who followed the primrose paths of pleasure. His expression was not one to inspire love or waken confidence in the heart of the girl who had thrust her way unannounced into his household.

He looked at her over his steel-rimmed spectacles. "You say you are Jeremiah's girl?"

"Yes," the answer came weakly, while the girl wondered what had suddenly happened to her splendid courage. She glanced at the elder daughter and found there the same stern expression the man carried in his

eyes. Only in the face of Aunt Mary was anything akin to welcome.

"My father is your son," she gathered her recreant senses together. "His name is Jerry."

"Jeremiah," corrected the man. "I never named no boy Jerry. He was named for me and I am Jeremiah. But he's been gone out of our lives for twenty years. Where is he? Why did he send you to us? Was he afraid to come himself and sent you instead? Why didn't you come long ago if you want to know us? Where's your mom?" The questions were given in rapid succession, while the three of the household waited for replies.

"My mother is dead, has been dead for sixteen years. And my father ——"

"Yes, what about him? Is he dead too?"

"No." Tears welled to the eyes of the girl. Oh, they wouldn't understand and pity and forgive! They would condemn. "He is in—in the penitentiary."

Aunt Mary drew in her breath and clapped a hand over her eyes as if she would shut out the terrible fact. Aunt Sybilla and her father nodded solemnly and the latter expressed the opinion of both when he said, "That's just where I thought he would end up when he went against the teachings of a good mother and father. In jail, and all because he married himself to a bad woman."

"No, no!" came the shrill protest of the girl. "My mother was not a bad woman! My mother didn't make my father get where he is to-day. If you can blame any one besides himself I guess"—she pointed an accusing finger to the man, her face drawn into a hard expression—"I guess the blame comes back to you. I know the

story of his life. You were so good and religious you couldn't have any mercy on a decent girl when she earned an honest living in the only way she thought she could and a way she thought was all right. You said she was wicked, but you didn't know her and had no right to judge. My father married her and they were happy, for they stuck to each other through thick and thin. He must have loved her an awful lot to give up a home like this and a mother like he told me about, but I guess that's what he did do, for he says he is not sorry he married her. Then she died and he had nobody but me, two years old. Perhaps if he could have brought me back here and stayed in his old home he would have been as good as when my mother lived. But you said you were through with him and he stayed away. He got into bad habits, counterfeited and got caught and arrested and put behind the bars. I was sent to a reformatory for there was no person to take care of me. I stayed there six years. Several months ago father told me about my people and here I am."

She looked defiantly up into the face of the old man, half wondering how she managed to say so long an indictment to the stern person.

"Well," his words came slowly as though he were weighing each one before utterance. "Here you are and I guess this is the place for you if you are in the family like you are. We will keep you even if you are the child of that ——"

"I wouldn't say it," she suggested with dangerous sweetness. "I guess you know your girls wouldn't want to hear anything mean about their mother and I love the memory of mine as much as they love the memory of their Mennonite mother." She raised her head and

looked at her grandfather with calm, level dignity. "I am here and would like to stay a while and get acquainted, but please don't ever say anything mean about my dead mother. She was sweet and good as any saint and I'll love her always, so I will! I love my father, too, even if he is in jail! Then you want me?" she asked with provoking Irish boldness. She knew only too well how dubious was her welcome.

Aunt Sybilla, so like the stern old man, smoothed her white cap strings and answered dutifully, "Of course, you got a right to be here. Long as pop is your grand-pap we ain't got no right to turn you out. Anyhow, where would you go? Guess this is the only place you can go unless you hire out and we wouldn't want that when it ain't necessary. But you got to behave yourself and not make abody ashamed with you. We got trouble enough a'ready without you givin' yet more. If you act like you should you dare stay for all it makes out to me. I guess pop will say the same, ain't?" She turned to the man for approval.

"Yes. She's in the family but look here—what's your name—Sarah? Well, Sarah, you don't dare talk no more to me like you done a while past! To say I drove your pop to the bad! I won't have it! I just wanted to make a good man out him and if he'd done like I tried to make him he'd be a blessing instead of makin' us all trouble. He's reapin' what he sowed."

"Yes"—Sarah lingered over the word and spoke with so great an apparent guilelessness that the man could not call her to halt. "Yes, he is reaping what he sowed and I suppose we all have some reaping to do we'd like to run away from if we could." The shrewd Pennsylvania Dutchman, wise and quick though he might be, was no

match for the clever Irish strain that was so strong in his newly found grandchild.

He admitted to himself that he did not relish the presence of the sharp-tongued, self-willed girl in his house but he could do no less than open his door for her. The knowledge that his son was a criminal was a sore blow to him, but it added strength to his ancient conviction that the ways of the world are evil ones, that dancing and all frivolities carry ruin and disgrace in their wake. Perhaps the child of the dancer could be redeemed, the influence of a religious family might keep her from following after her parents—oh, what a double inheritance the child had—weakness, worldliness! It would be their duty to train her in the way she should go.

Presently Aunt Sybilla departed up-stairs to prepare a room for the new member. Aunt Mary followed timidly after her, though she longed to stay and become acquainted with the girl. Sarah was left alone with her grandfather. She squirmed about on her chair, but he paid no attention to her uneasiness as he sat with his hands resting on his cane and his eyes downcast. The silence and presence of the man so deep in thought made her restive.

"May I," she asked quietly, "please may I go out in the yard and see the flowers?"

He looked at her suddenly; his eyes had lost some of their stern coldness and a brooding sadness was in them. When he spoke he sounded totally unlike the accusing man who had said such stinging things about her parents. "Go out. We got a nice yard."

She found her way through the hall, dining-room and into the immaculate kitchen open to the breezes from the back yard. At the kitchen window she stood still and

looked out. The green loveliness of the grass and flower-decked yard brought a sudden lump to her throat. She dashed away a few tears, her lips quivered—"I'm home at last! But I'm not welcome. I'll have to work and earn my place here. If I weren't so much of a coward I'd pack right back to Miss Hughes, but it takes more courage to do that than to stay here, so I'll stay." The yearning for a home was for the time paramount over the wicked desire to teach them what "mean little hypocrites they were" as she had said on the mountain.

Up-stairs the two sisters faced each other. "Mary," the elder said sternly, "it seems like more than we deserve in the way of burdens to have that girl, the child of a dancer, in our home. Jeremiah makes trouble for us even after he's been away for twenty years."

"Poor Jerry," the other whispered.

"Yes, you pitied him always; you got too much of his softness in you! Me, I'm like pop now, I make no fuss over wickedness; I call a spade a spade and a sin a sin."

"I know, Sybilla, you are very strong and so good a Christian like I can never be. Guess I got too much easiness in me, like you say. But I can't seem to get over it, no matter how hard I try still. Now mebbe this is our chance to help poor Sarah, to show her the right way and keep her from goin' to the bad."

"Well, that's the only way I can find any comfort in her bein' here. She's not much of a Burkhart, did you notice? Her eyes and hair must be her mom's. Her nose, turnin' up, is all that's ours. But to think of it—our Jeremiah, our own flesh and blood, to be in jail! Fairview will have somethin' to talk about now for a while."

"Must they know?"

"Ach, how could abody keep it quiet in a town like this? We might as good print it in the *Examiner* next week for everybody will know the girl is here and want to know who she is and where her pop is and before you know the cat will be out the bag. So we might better tell and done with it. We can't lie."

"No, we can't lie," agreed Mary. "Sybilla, it makes abody feel bad about her not havin' a home for so long and livin' in one of them places they sent bad girls to. I thought still only terrible bad ones was there, but I guess nobody wanted her and what could they do with her? If only her pop'd sent her to us long a'ready! It's a wonder she ain't gone to the bad altogether bein' in with them others. Now we got to show her how good a home she has here."

"Don't you go spoilin' her a'ready. She's her mom's child and I guess we got our hands full till she grows up. She looks strong and can help with the work. It'll come in handy this summer with the cherries and things to can and garden to tend and such things. Mebbe for all it's good she come, and she's relation to us."

"Well, I guess!" said Mary, smiling, "'bout as near as we got except pop." The face of the younger woman bore a strange, unwonted expression. At last she was going to have one of her eternal longings satisfied—a young person in the house, to love and teach and help. Sarah was sure of one friend. But she had no pre-science of that friendship as she stood by the kitchen window and looked out at the yard. A sudden loneliness seized her; she wished she had her dog, or Miss Hughes, or even Mrs. Maloney, to talk to. Then she heard her name called and turned to the hall.

"Ma'am?" she answered.

"Fetch your things up here," came Aunt Sybilla's voice. As the girl reached the top step the aunt told her, "You needn't call me ma'am. I'm your Aunt Sybilla. You call me that."

"Yes, Aunt Sybilla." The girl was suddenly very meek as she followed the woman into a big room where a freshly made bed stood along one side.

"This will be your room. You dare take care of it yourself, all but the sweepin' every week on Friday. I do that. Can you make a bed?"

"Oh, yes! I learned to work in the reformatory."

"And you needn't keep talkin' about that reform'tory all the time, neither. In a little town like Fairview such things gets round quick enough without you tell them every time you open your mouth."

"Yes, ma'am, I mean Aunt Sybilla! You must pardon me if I forget how to address you for I never had an aunt. You see I never had any family till I found you. That's the reason I was so anxious for father to tell me where to find you for I did so want relatives like other people have."

"And you needn't talk about your pop all the time, either," came another command of the woman. "We can talk without draggin' his name in. Your grandpap ain't too anxious to hear his name and me neither, seein' all the trouble we had from his actin'."

Sarah's strange meekness vanished like smoke. She tossed her head and said, "When it comes to my father no one is going to muzzle me! I care for him and I guess it's no crime to talk about him." Her loyal heart had no thought to allow the memory of him to sink into oblivion.

"Well," responded the woman diplomatically, "if you

want the whole town of Fairview to hash over all the things your pop done and get it printed in the paper that he's in jail, just you go ahead and talk about him all the time, that's all!"

"Oh, I guess—I guess perhaps it would be wiser not to mention him too often. But I'll think about him; nobody can stop me thinking about him!"

"Put your things in that closet and then come down in the kitchen," ordered Aunt Sybilla. "Mebbe you can help your Aunt Mary for I got work in the garden yet. This here comin' unexpected upset the day for us. Now you know where your room is I can go back to my work."

When Sarah was left alone in her sanctum she looked about. It was the largest bedroom she had ever seen. In the home on the mountain they were such tiny things, but this—it appeared very fine to her eyes. The old-fashioned walnut bureau and its tombstone marble slab top was novel to her. Also the massive bed with its patchwork quilt, the wash-stand with its pitcher and bowl and its red-outlined splasher tacked to the back to save the wall-paper, the rag carpet and hooked rugs. On a hooked rug spread before the bureau was the word WELCOME drawn in with vivid red wool on a background of tan. The absurdity of the word in her room when she was certainly not as welcome as the rug implied sent her into a merry gale of laughter. "Why," she gasped after a moment's indulgence in mirth, "I can laugh yet! Bless me, if I didn't think I clean forgot how since Aunt Sybilla scared me stiff."

Her room was lovely, she thought, perfectly lovely; there at least she was not disappointed. But the rooms down-stairs, what she had seen of them, were impressive. Her family must be wealthy to have a house with

so many rooms, all large ones, and furnished with heavy furniture and fine carpets almost covered with numerous small rugs. And the lawn and porch—she sighed with pleasure to think it was all a part of her home. What a place for little children! How the Maloney baby that died from the heat would have enjoyed that grass and fresh air!

“Sarah!”

“Yes, ma’am, I mean, Aunt Mary,” she answered the call over the stairway.

“Are you soon comin’?”

“Right away. I was dreaming.”

“Ach, then it’s all right. I just thought mebbe you didn’t know you should come down when you get done.”

Sarah ran down the stairs and out to the kitchen. She felt less restraint in the presence of the gentle aunt who had inherited the mother’s traits rather than the paternal ones.

“Let me help you, Aunt Mary,” she begged; “the cook at school said I was real handy.” Aunt Mary took her at her word and the girl was soon busy with preparations for supper. A feeling of friendliness sprang up in her heart. With her impulsive Irish quickness she said to the white-capped woman as they worked together in the kitchen, “I like you, Aunt Mary, and feel we are going to be friends. But that other aunt with the queer name—say, can she smile at all?”

“Hush,” warned the woman. “Sybilla is always quiet-like and sad. She’s had a big trouble in her life. She never got over it right. But it’s most twenty years ago and I think still I’d kinda forgot all about it by now, but then abody thinks still you would do so and so till you get to the same place.”

"Trouble," echoed Sarah, "had trouble twenty years ago and still looks like a funeral about it! Who ever heard of such a thing? That's just like Mrs. Maloney used to say, some people hold on to their troubles so hard they couldn't slip away if they wanted to."

"But, ach," Aunt Mary's face was soft with sympathy, "poor Sybilla had an awful big trouble."

"What kind?"

"Sh!" cautioned the woman, "we don't talk about it at all! But abody can see Sybilla thinks about it and ain't goin' to ever get over it right."

"But what was it, what dreadful thing happened to her?"

"Sh! Mebbe some day I might tell you about it. But you must bear with her and not mind when she is a little cross or strict. She is so unhappy all the time, but she's so good, much better than I. If trouble hits the worst one in the family I would got it stead of poor Sybilla, but me, I never had much trouble in my life. Sybilla says still that if the Lord loved them He chasten-eth, like it says in the Bible, then He must love her an awful lot to give her such a burden."

"Um," Sarah was thoughtful, "Miss Hughes used to say that she knew some people who held on to burdens that would roll away if the people only had sense enough to let go."

"Yes? I never heard anything like that—now, mebbe, for all, that might be true. But I know that Sybilla is a good woman and she's kinda boss round here, being the oldest and all. So if you do what she tells you she'll treat you right."

"Say," said Sarah, "isn't that the way of most of us? We're nice to them who are nice to us but when

it comes to sinners and those who go against us—
whew!”

Her words set the woman thinking. “Sarah,” she said softly, “it wouldn’t wonder me none if we learned a few things yet from you before you get done with us!”

The girl laughed, but she remembered the words. “Mrs. Maloney, a woman who lived in the same street when I was little, used to say that children and fools speak the truth, so perhaps I do hit the nail on the head sometimes.”

The evening meal in the Burkhart home was a simple one in their opinion but to Sarah, accustomed to the plain fare of the reformatory, it was a feast. She helped to carry it to the big table in the kitchen, then sat down where she was directed by Sybilla. During a long grace said by her grandfather she kept her head bowed as low as the others. Then when it was ended she sat up expectantly, ready for the first meal in her new home. Something of the sacredness of a love-feast seemed to hover round the table for the girl, but Aunt Sybilla began very matter-of-factly to pass the food and settle to the task of consuming it.

“You know,” began Sarah, “when I first went to—to the mountain I thought it was the funniest thing to say grace every meal-time.”

“What!” exclaimed Aunt Sybilla. “Didn’t you get learned to do that at home when you was little?”

“In Red Rose Court?” laughed the girl. “If you could see that place!” Then her face grew serious, her voice was filled with the appealing tenderness that played such havoc upon heart-strings. “You people can’t know what it means to me to have a real home after so many years of being without one!”

"Sarah," the grandfather told her, "you be a good girl and you will always have a good home here."

"Yes"—her peculiarly characteristic reasoning followed—"I believe that, but don't you think that sometimes when people don't behave is just the time they need the good home most?" Her words left the others strangely silent. What manner of girl was this? Was she, indeed, of their own flesh and blood? Ah, that despised, detested Irish strain in her must be responsible for her strange beliefs and sayings! The meal was rather a silent one. Evidently talking and eating did not seem to be in favor at the same time in that home.

"Oh," thought Sarah, "I'll change a few things around here if I stay long enough! Perhaps if I lick them into shape they'll be a first-class family!" Her face lighted with a whimsical smile.

That night after the girl had been piloted up-stairs by Aunt Mary, taught to light the oil lamp and extinguish it, there was a family conference in the sitting-room down-stairs.

"She's of our flesh and blood and it's our duty to keep her," said the old man. "But she don't seem just like the girls here in Fairview. It might be that she was sent to us just to be converted and pointed to the light. We don't want another Burkhart goin' to the bad."

Mary nodded quiet approval. But Sybilla was slower to acquiesce. "Well," she deliberated, "it looks like a big job to make a quiet, refined girl out of her, but mebbe like pop says she was sent here for the salvation of her soul. It's plain she had no religious teachin', such queer things like she says, such dumb ones, and kinda makin' fun of holy things. Mebbe we can make a Christian outa her."

And so began the reformation of Sarah Burkhart, the child of Red Rose Court and Sunset Mountain and simultaneously began the reformation of Jeremiah Burkhart and his daughters!

CHAPTER IX

FAIRVIEW'S RECEPTION

SYBILLA BURKHART had spoken truly when she said that in a little town like Fairview the news of the new arrival in their home would travel rapidly. The majority of residents had little sympathy for the father of Sarah. In many households youths prone to error were held in check by the dreadful prediction, "If you don't do better you'll go to the bad like young Jerry Burkhart!" Thanks to the derelictions of the said Jerry Burkhart many youthful propensities to evil were curbed among the rising generation of Fairview, which proves the theory that even in wickedness may dwell some glimmer of good, some valuable by-product be derived from apparent uselessness. But the town had long since listed young Jerry among the black, hopelessly black, sheep of its fold and wondered how it had come to pass that so righteous a man as Jeremiah senior could be the father of so wicked a son. After his departure from Fairview the people felt as though an evil influence had been lifted from the place. They knew of his marriage with the dreadful woman, but of his later life and incarceration were as ignorant as his own people had been until the coming of Sarah.

Several neighbors had seen the stranger enter and formed various conjectures as to the nature of her errand. The driver of the Transfer spread the news that a fine, stylish young lady had asked him where Jeremiah

Burkhart lived and she had a bag and looked like she came to stay a while. But all doubt as to the transientness of the visitor was answered that night when watching neighbors saw the screens placed in the windows of the front spare room and a lamp standing on the bureau. That settled it; the young lady had come to stay, at least a while. For everybody knew that one-or-two-night visitors to the Burkhart house were placed invariably in the little spare room to the south side of the house; it was only the lengthy visit that caused the opening of the big spare room facing the street.

Urgent, consuming inquisitiveness was rampant among the people on the street near by. It was the neighbor directly opposite the big Burkhart house who undertook to gather the information. She discovered very opportunely that she had in her kitchen a plate belonging to the Burkhart girls so she decided, "It's about time to take that there plate back once."

Hence, on the second day of Sarah's stay in her new home, while she and Aunt Mary were washing the breakfast dishes, there was a step on the back porch and a breezy voice called, "I brought back your plate once. Guess you thought we eat it with the cake but—land, you got company! If I'd knowed that I'd dressed!" She swung back her apron and tried to look surprised.

"Come in, Mrs. Roth," invited Mary Burkhart. "You might just as good meet our company now. This is Sarah, our Jerry's girl."

"Jeremiah's girl!" Even the gossiping Mrs. Roth was surprised. She had never dreamed of that identity for the stranger! "Why, I didn't know he had any children. My, my, that's a surprise! Abody don't get many in this little town, but here's one once!"

"Yes, it will give Fairview something to talk over. Some folks got ears like buckets anyhow, always ready to catch something. Now I guess they'll have a good time tellin' all about poor Jerry and that his girl is with us. Jeremiah was married, you knew that."

"Was? Is he dead then? Or her?"

"She's dead, but he's livin' ——" the woman was reluctant to place on exhibition another part of the family skeleton. But the curiosity of Mrs. Roth was as a ravenous beast and hard to be appeased.

"Then if he's living why is his girl here—only on a visit?"

"No, she come to stay."

"Oh," cried Sarah, "let me tell her. Don't try to keep it a secret on my account." Poor, innocent child had no knowledge of the workings of small-town gossips or the sharp tools of their trade.

"Well," said Aunt Mary hesitatingly, "I guess abody might as good tell it for it will come out anyhow soon. Jerry—he—he done wrong and is in jail!"

"Jail! You don't mean it!" Mrs. Roth's eyes positively danced with amazement. What a rare bit of gossip she was unearthing that day! "Jail, that's just where I thought he'd wind up! My, my, how hard for your pop and you girls to have such a disgrace. It must be awful to know your brother is in a place like that! That's one thing I can say about my family, there ain't been a real bad one in that I remember."

"Oh, tell that to the Marines," said the girl, tossing her head. "I guess every tree has some rotten branches. But I'll tell you, Mrs. Roth, my father isn't real bad. He made money by counterfeiting and is paying for it all right more than lots of people pay for the money they

make dishonestly. There's lots worse than my poor father floating around loose."

Mrs. Roth looked at the girl, aghast. Her glib tongue failed her unaccountably for a moment. What manner of girl was this? So bold, strange in speech, disrespectful of her elders and *bettters*—but what else could be expected of a daughter of young Jerry Burkhart!

"Poor Mary," she sighed, "you have my sympathy. It's bad enough to have a brother in jail but to have to be afflicted with his girl—my, my! But mebbe it's good for her you got her in time, then you can reform her."

"Oh, no," interrupted Sarah, determined to shock the busybody further. "*I have* been reformed! I spent the last six years in a reformatory in New Jersey, so you see I am all right now."

"A reformatory! Six years!" What an orgy of gossip-dispensing was in store for Mrs. Roth! "My, my, what a cross for you good people! It wonders me sometimes why you got such troubles when you are all such good people. If there is anything I can do to help you don't mind letting me know. Me and Dan are only too glad to help the neighbors in trouble." Then she looked at Sarah as though the girl were some hitherto undiscovered specie of utter depravity. It might have been the first time she was privileged with a close look into the face of a girl who was not only the daughter of a jail-bird, but the recent inmate of a reformatory. She appeared to suspect that the girl would poke out a mocking tongue or screw up her face in derision of her *bettters*, but Sarah looked at her and smiled a cryptic smile that left the gossip wondering what it meant, as the thousands who look at Mona Lisa each year are wondering whence and why that smile.

"Well, I must hurry home, I got work to do," and the neighbor took her leave, thrilling with importance, for she carried in her brain the details of the star gossip scoop of years.

But the work was evidently not in her own home. If Mary or Sarah had been in the parlor fifteen minutes later they would have seen Mrs. Roth hurrying up the street. She meant to call at five or six stores, the post-office, the bank, the dressmaker's, the cobbler shop and at the homes of several close friends and casually mention the news—Jeremiah Burkhart was in jail for counterfeiting and his daughter, about eighteen, was in Fairview with his people and going to stay. She had been in a reformatory for six years—it was very important to add that, for of all the wayward youths of Fairview none ever set foot in a reformatory. Some had gotten into scrapes but if it had concerned money their parents had paid the damages and the youths were left free. Not one, of all the long list of boys and girls born and reared in Fairview, had ever been bad enough to be confined in a place like the one in which Sarah had spent six years. Six years—that proved how very, very bad she must have been! "No wonder she was a bold, brazen thing, talking so to me," was the thought of Mrs. Roth as she hurried to the home of a friend.

"I tell you," she confided to the friend, "it means that we keep our young people away from her. She'll spoil them all. I remember having the teacher in Sunday school tell us once about a man who had a whole barrel of good apples and put a rotten one in with them to see if the good ones would make the rotten one all right. But of course, the one rotten one spoiled the whole barrel of good ones! I won't have my Dan running around

with any girl like Sarah Burkhart. Even if she is related to that nice family, she must know lots of bad things our girls and boys don't dream of, and we don't want to have them spoiled by her."

After Mrs. Roth left Aunt Mary sighed.

"What's the trouble?" asked Sarah. "Don't you like her, either?"

"What—why ——" The girl's insight was uncanny. "I was just thinkin' that she talks too much."

"Yes," agreed Aunt Sybilla who had been told about the early morning visitor. "I guess she does. She'll be goin' up town soon to tell the news."

Sarah laughed. "Walking newspaper, like lots of women! But I wrote a poem once about too much talking. I'll recite it to you.

"The owl looks wise and never says a word,
So folks pronounce it a wise old bird.
If we talked less while going to and fro
No one could tell how little 'tis we know!"

"Now, that ain't no lie!" declared Aunt Sybilla. "Abody does talk too much!"

So Sarah returned to the home of her father, the home where she had dreamed of a welcome; happy times like parties, Christmas trees, Easter nests, jolly visitors. Poor little girl, whose only recollection of a home was the engraving of the squalid hovels in Red Rose Court! How long until her hopes be materialized, her vaporous rainbows be crystallized into reality?

The girl, quick to detect hostility or suspicion, made wise by long contact with trouble and misfortune, was not slow in finding the true state of mind concerning her.

The double stigma branded her above all hope of redemption or fitness for friendship with the correct young people of Fairview. So thought many of the good people of that little town, people who religiously paid tithe in anise and mint but omitted the weightier matters of charity and forbearing and understanding. It was the same old story of intolerant, narrow human nature. Wasn't it too great a risk to take into their homes a girl like Sarah, and invite contamination for the girls who had been so carefully taught and guarded from all evil! That was the natural attitude of every mother and is not without justification. Of course the newcomer was entitled to any help they could give her—the missionary spirit was alive in the little town. She came in for the same consideration as the heathens in Zanzibar or the cannibals of the ocean isles. But when it came to loving her, associating with her, taking her into the intimacy of their fine homes—she was without the pale. The first Saturday no less than six persons called at the Burkhart house and offered to take Sarah to Sunday school if she cared to go. But she saw through the ruse and shocked them by saying she didn't think she wanted to go, she had to go to church every Sunday in New Jersey and she thought a change would be pleasant. At any rate, she had joined the Episcopal Church over in Jersey and if she wanted to go to any service she could go alone, for that church stood just around the corner from her house.

Her apparent lack of interest in church matters did not tend to lessen the prejudice against her. She was spoken of as a little heathen, probably one of the infidels who have no thought about their souls.

But Aunt Sybilla settled for Sarah the matter of church attendance. The first Sunday was a typical Lan-

caster County spring day, with robins caroling, sunshine spilling gold over the great outdoors, soft winds laden with perfumes like the scents of Araby. It was a day that called, invited, lured responsive hearts away from walls and roofs. Sarah heard its call. Such a day she loved, but how minor the portions of enjoyment if it had to be spent indoors.

When Aunt Sybilla asked at breakfast, "Sarah, is it true what you told Mrs. Roth and them other ladies what came to ask you go along to church, that you are a 'Piscopal?'"

"Yes. I was confirmed two years ago in the little church at the foot of Sunset Mountain."

"Well, then I guess you want to go to that church. But anyhow, you got to go somewheres every Sunday. Long as you live in our house you keep the Sabbath right. You dare go to your own or whenever you want a simple service that mebbe might do you more good than all that funny 'Piscopal foolin' with gettin' up and down all the time, then you come along with us to Mennonite once."

"I'll go with you this morning," she decided, not so much in the hope of enjoying or profiting by a simple service as with the youthful desire to find something novel.

"I'm glad," said the aunt, "for in this house everybody goes to church anyhow once on Sunday unless they're sick or something."

"Well, I generally have a weak spell every Sunday," said the girl roguishly, but her aunt failed to see the humor of it. There was not one spark of Irish in Aunt Sybilla, that was plain!

"What for dumb talk is that?" she asked, frowning.

"We don't make fun at church goin'! Get yourself ready soon so we can start early, Sarah. We don't get late to church, we don't!"

The girl's interest in new things was fully alive that Sunday morning as she sat in the Mennonite Meeting House with her new-found family. What a strange place it was, in her opinion! Bare, white walls, no musical instrument, no cushioned seats or carpeted aisles! It brought her a curious sense of peace. Through the wide open windows came the sound of singing robins, the twitter of busy sparrows, and occasionally the sweet call of a song sparrow as it swayed on a branch within sight of the girl. As the service progressed the girl's feeling of peace deepened. How wonderful it must be to go through life with the calm serenity of the white-capped women, but the disturbing thought intruded—were not the lives of the plain women sometimes at variance with the very calmness they sought to express by their plain clothes? Did not storms rage, passions trouble, sorrows burden the hearts under the plain dresses? Ah, life was such a riddle, thought the child who had seen so many of its worst aspects.

Once as she looked at her grandfather her heart thrilled. How strong he appeared, how like a prophet, a veritable Jeremiah! And he was hers, a part of her family, her ancestor of whom she might boast as she had read people sometimes did! A man like that to be the father of a—a—she could not think the word in the quiet Mennonite Church! In that same place her father had sat and swung his legs impatiently at the tediousness of the preachers, now he languished behind barred windows and heavy doors. What was wrong, whose the fault?

Some idea of what it cost her grandfather to sit there

calmly under the gaze of pitying friends who must be thinking of the son, came to her. Poor grandfather, for the first time she began to see that perhaps he had done his duty as he saw it, that his heart must ache for the erring boy. He looked sadder than upon that first day when she had surprised him by announcing her relationship to him. "Poor grandfather, I am going to try hard to like him and please him. Guess this business of havin' a son wander off hasn't been a very happy one for him, either. These are my people and it seems to be my duty to adapt myself to their ways so far as I can ever do that, if I want to stay with them. After all, it's hard luck to have a girl drop from the skies and say, 'I'm your granddaughter, so take care of me and love me.' I did have a nerve! But I'm here and goin' to stay for a while and get acquainted."

The coming of the new member of the family did not disturb the household to any visible extent. Old Jeremiah went to his hardware store as usual, cane in hand, face set and solemn. Sybilla capably managed the affairs of the home, worked in the garden and house, while Mary was content to do the tasks the elder sister left to her and Sarah fitted in at so many places that she wondered, after a few weeks, how they ever got along without her. Her willing hands could relieve the women of many tasks and earned for her the first praise of Aunt Sybilla, "You're real handy. They had some sense up there where you lived, for they learned you to cook and work and be of some use."

"I'm glad I can help you, then I shall feel less like a parasite."

"What's that?"

"Things that live off others."

"Um, well, there's plenty of them around without you bein' one yet!"

Her commendation was sweet to the girl and gave her courage to ask a question she had longed to ask during the week and more of her stay in the new home—"Aunt Sybilla——"

"Well, what?"

"Why, when will I learn to know some girls? I see some pass in the evenings, some nice-looking ones who I think I'd like, but how am I going to get acquainted with them?"

"Guess not at all unless they take it in their heads to come and see you. But I don't believe they want to meet you very bad, seein' how it's all around town that your pop is in jail and you was in a place for bad girls for six years." The bluntness of the words almost staggered the girl, who knew so little of some of the ways of the world.

"You mean, you think, that because my father is where he is I must be treated like a leper?"

"Ach, don't talk so dumb! Like a leper! I guess if you was that you'd find something else out!"

"Well," cried the girl, her old childish temper mounting, "I'd just as soon be one as to be treated like you say; everybody runs from me!"

Some innate sympathy stirred in the woman as she saw the distress on the face of the girl. It was too bad! "Now," she said soothingly, "you wait a while, mebbe some of the nice girls will come round. I guess they ain't all afraid of you. You must act nice and show them you aren't poison. You take the pocketbook and go to the store at the corner for some sugar."

She did as she was bid, but there was none of her

wonted springing lightness in her steps as she started up the tree-shaded street. Was Aunt Sybilla right in her conjecture? Would the young people of the town ignore her because of what had happened in past years? She had been an innocent victim of circumstances, but she knew that did not always prevent injustice. Perhaps Aunt Sybilla was soured; what could she know about the hearts of youth! But even as her hopelessness gave way to brighter things her attention was arrested by the sound of her name. The next moment she became an unwilling listener to two girls loitering inside a half-opened doorway—"That dreadful Burkhart girl! Imagine Mary Becker saying she is going to call on her and try to get her in our crowd! We all told Mary we'd cut her dead if she dared to do it. Of course that girl is good looking with wonderful eyes and black hair but who wants to associate with her? Mrs. Roth says ——"

What Mrs. Roth had said Sarah could supply from her imagination. She went to the store, her brain saying over and over like a worn-out song, "Why did I come here? They don't want me, they don't want me!"

At the store a smile came her way and she was grateful for it as a starving child for bread. It came from a little old woman, who spoke atrocious English, but it warmed the heart of the girl.

"How you like Fairview by now? Pretty good, ain't? It is a nice place when you are acquainted around once. How are the old girls to-day, pretty good? Fine girls, they are fine girls! Here are a few peppermints. I like them still for when I don't feel so right. Mebbe you like them?"

Sarah accepted the offering in the same spirit in which she knew it was bestowed and some of the weight of

her heart rolled away as she returned to her home. But the burden was too great to be cast off with her customary Irish cheerfulness. Her heart was suddenly aching as it had not done for years. All the pent up desires for home and family love, denied through the formative years of her life, and thus intensified into an obsession, struggled within her. To be an outcast after all, to have the girls continue passing her, gay, laughing groups, to be shut from pleasures and lose her place at the very moment when it seemed she was coming into her own—it was too much for the girl and she ran from the house to find some place where she could cry out all her pain and grief.

CHAPTER X

IN THE CHERRY TREE

IN the big lot to the rear of the Burkhart house stood half a dozen cherry trees. Sarah had exclaimed at their mass of blossoms and several times had climbed into one to get closer to their beauty. It was there she ran that hour of her travail. She swung up on a low branch, white as a bridal bower in its mass of flowers, then climbed farther into the white loveliness and buried her face in the cherry blossoms and cried. Great sobs shook her, her breath came in gasping, choking efforts. When the worst agony was over a dull pain still held her.

"I don't care," she said aloud, "it isn't fair! Even if I am a reformatory girl and the daughter of a criminal I can be all right. How does any one of these people in Fairview know that I am not fit to associate with them? It isn't fair! Miss Hughes didn't think I was so dreadful a creature—why didn't I stay with her? Here they think I'm bad, bad ——"

"Who is this that's bad?" a strange voice asked and startled the girl so that she almost fell out of the cherry tree. She looked about. Just over the fence in the adjoining lot stood a young man looking up at her. Then she remembered that Aunt Mary had told her the rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church lived in the house next door. But surely this young man was too ridiculously young to be rector of a church! Some visitor probably, and an inquisitive one! He had heard her cry! Of

course it would be her luck to have some person see and hear her when she made a baby of herself!

"Who are you?" she demanded crossly.

At that the young man jumped over the low fence and stood under the tree in which she was perched.

"Who are you?" he retaliated.

She looked at him and found him to be a comely creature, clean, smiling, with kind eyes. Her first impulse to send him away died.

"Who am I?" she said. "A dreadful person! A regular ogress! Better go away from me before you become contaminated."

"As bad as all that?" he asked, his eyes smiling refutation of her words. He had nice eyes, she decided, brown, but it was not the color, rather the warm glow in them that held her attention. Could one lie to eyes like that?

"Yes," she said, suddenly finding the stranger trustworthy, "the people of Fairview think I'm that and worse! Guess you heard that Jeremiah's granddaughter came to his house and that her father is in jail and she has been in a reformatory for six years—could anything be worse?"

"Well, I don't know—that does sound pretty bad, but then things are not what they seem ——"

"Longfellow said that."

"He did—you know that? Who are you to be up in Jeremiah's cherry tree and knowing poetry? You said something about his granddaughter—are you that? I didn't know there was such a person. You see I have been out of town for a week and haven't heard the news yet."

"Then if you like gossip you have a wonderful treat

in store for you! Everybody knows about me, Jeremiah Burkhart's granddaughter."

"I didn't know there was such a person."

"Neither did he until last week. I dropped from the skies, and I'm thinking it was his unlucky day."

"But why all the—the ——"

"The tears?" she helped him. Of course he had heard her cry! "Oh, I'm sore because I don't fit here and I did so want to."

"What's to hinder? Isn't there lots of room in that big house and can't you be a help and comfort to old Jeremiah and his daughters?"

"Comfort!" The girl's clear, rippling laughter rang out and at the sound he started. He had never heard so gay, unaffected a laugh. It was infectious and he heard his own deeper one join it. "Oh, but you're funny!" she told him. "Comfort! About as much comfort as sleeping on a bed of tacks, points up, that's what! No, whoever you are, kind sir, I tell you I'm not in the right place. Somewhere I read a poem once that began like this, 'He drew a circle that shut me out, heretic, rebel, a thing to flout'—I don't know the rest, but I guess that suits me. They think I'm a rebel, heretic and most everything I shouldn't be." A sarcastic note crept into her voice. "The good people of this town are afraid I'll spoil their dear, sweet, lovely sons and daughters and that is why I sit alone in a cherry tree, or work with old-maid aunts, or look at the chickens while the other girls laugh and have a good time. Oh, I'm hurt and mad—go on with you and leave me alone! I want to cry!"

"No you don't. You want to come down from that tree and talk to me."

"With you? I don't!" she said decidedly.

168. THE MADONNA OF THE CURB

"Please," his voice was coaxing and gentle, "do let's get acquainted."

Sarah pursed her lips, pondered a moment, then smiled down at him and started to climb from the tree.

"See, I'm part Irish and when you are kind and good to me I'm just like putty." She gave one leap and stood before him. "Who are you?"

"One who is interested in you and wants to help you."

"Oh, then you *are* the rector!" She spoke as though it were an accusation.

His face flushed at her tone. "Is that so dreadful?" he asked.

"I don't know. I never saw a live rector except in church. Never had one climb over the fence and talk to me while I was up in a cherry tree. But all the preachers I ever heard of want to uplift you and help you no matter whether you want to be helped or not. I hope you're not that kind for I have to live next door to you as long as I stay in Fairview. I'm not looking for good advice, either, for I have enough of that bottled up in my brain to keep a regiment of incorrigibles going for years. Why the—I was going to say *dickens* but I remembered in time—why the Sam Hill doesn't some one tell you preachers that if you'd treat us like human beings instead of wooden things to be shaved off here and pared down there to fit your mould you'd have an easier time to reform us!"

"You think we fail?"

"I don't think, I know you do, too often. Every one of the people of Fairview who thinks I'm too bad to associate with their children would be willing to dig after money in their pockets and give to the heathen or any other good purpose, but the heathen in their midst

is too much for them. Lordy, I wish they'd seen me six years ago!" The thought of the ragged little girl who left Red Rose Court sent her into laughter. The rector had again the feeling of being refreshed by the clarity and sincerity of that laughter. "Too bad I didn't come to Fairview when I went to Sunset Mountain! Bet Mrs. Roth would have hung a smallpox sign on me then! Never mind, I'm not going to mind, at least not show them that I do mind. If I ran away from them they'd be tickled to death so I think I'll stay. I'll get Mrs. Roth's goat yet! Her Dan looked at me yesterday when I went to the store on an errand for Aunt Mary. You know he works for grandfather. He looks like a simpleton, but she thinks he's made of gold. Of course he's way above me, but if he weren't working for grandfather I'd have slapped him in the face yesterday for the way he looked at me."

The man regarded the girl. What manner of young woman was this new neighbor? "I see," he told her, "you *are* different from the run of young people but that does not say that you are below them. It may be a very delightful superiority when one comes to know you better. You will surely find a way into the affections of some of the nice girls in town. Wouldn't you like to come to Sunday school ——"

"'Et tu, Brutus!'" Then she laughed. "All the missionaries of the town called last week to take me but I declined with thanks."

"I thought you'd meet the young people that way."

"I see, your motive is all right." She read in his face a desire to help her feel less keenly the aloofness of the town people. "I *will* come," she promised, slightly irritated to have him think that she needed the Sunday

school. "I will come and I'll make some of those people like me. Miss Hughes used to say I have a magnetic personality, but I won't believe it until I get the people to like this 'heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.' You think I'm that, too! I see it in your face. Oh, don't bother denying it, it isn't worth the effort," she said as he would have protested at her uncanny insight into his heart. "I can't blame people, I suppose. I have to prove I'm not what they think."

"I haven't offended you?" His voice was troubled. Had he bungled in his effort to help the girl?

"Oh, no. I'm not easily hurt, I wear a pretty stout armor. I don't often let myself go and climb into trees to cry. Pshaw, I wish I knew the rest of that heretic poem!"

"I do—'But love and I had the wit to win, we drew a circle that took him in.'"

She repeated it after him, then gave a soft, "Whew! Some circle! But I am going to draw it! Watch me! You are the first kind person I met since I came to Fairview, except Aunt Mary, and the woman at the little store on the corner—she doled out peppermints to me one day—and the old man who drives the Transfer—why, that isn't so bad after all! I really didn't know I have been the recipient of so much kindness until I stopped to name them all. Guess I'll manage in Fairview, after all. You bolstered up my wobbly courage and now I feel ready to tackle anything. Aunt Mary is lovely to me, but tell me, did you ever see Aunt Sybilla laugh? Honest now!"

"Not very often," he admitted, smiling.

"I knew it. I'm glad for one thing, that the Lord put some Irish into me so I know how to laugh. Is there

Irish in you? If we are going to be neighbors and you are going to have a hand in my reform I ought to know your name, I'm thinking."

"Yes. It's James Snavelly."

"Reverend James Snavelly," she repeated. "I like the sound of it. Are you Pennsylvania Dutch—but I suppose not, for you don't speak like most of them do."

"I am one," he said it proudly. "I was born on a farm near Fairview, but we moved in to town when I was about twelve and here I spent my days until time to go away to college. I had my course in New England but when I was ready to preach I felt I wanted to come back to my own people, so here I am."

"I see. Live alone in that big house or have you a wife?"

"No wife. I have a housekeeper, a very nice old lady, a widow some sixty years old. Her greatest pleasure is to spoil me, cook me dishes I like, keep the place like a new pin, just because she used to know my mother and feels sorry for me."

"Of course," agreed the girl, with a twinkle in her eyes. "She couldn't possibly like you a little bit for your own sake, it's all on account of your mother! But haven't you any aunts or anybody could live with you?"

"No, I'm the last of the family. Haven't a relative nearer than third cousins."

"Ah, I'm sorry." Her words embraced him like a mother's arms. "Then you haven't a home, either?"

"I can't say that, exactly."

"No, you can't, but it's the truth just the same. Living with an old woman to keep house isn't having a real home."

He frowned at her perspicacity, then changed to a

smile as he read in her face the sadness she was striving so valiantly to conceal.

"Are we going to be friends then, companions in exile?" he asked.

"Poor homeless creatures," she added. "But you aren't in the same boat with me. You are among the elect while I am in the heretic, rebel class. Oh, I'm glad I met you for now I know the other two lines of that poem."

"Yes. I am glad I met you for we want to be friends. You must have some good times like other young girls of the town."

"Oh, thank you!" She took his hand impulsively, then dropped it, embarrassed. What could she know about etiquette? How could she tell beforehand the thrill that would make her breathless as she touched his hand? For the first time in her life she was self-conscious and her face flushed with timidity.

He came to her rescue by taking her right hand and giving it the cordial clasp he gave his church attendants after the service, a rather impersonal yet friendly shake. "We are going to be friends and you are going to be happy! Just keep on thinking that and it will happen."

"Laws," she cried, "you sound like Mrs. Maloney. She used to say that if you thought long enough and hard enough about a thing you'd get it *if you went after it!*"

"That sounds interesting. Will you tell me about Mrs. Maloney some day?"

"I'd be glad to. I can tell you lots of things about the slums you never knew and won't believe unless you know. I'm a bum liar and take my word for them."

"Yes ——" again the word was drawn into a long question. Here was a new aspect on the problem of souls. A child of the slums ready to teach him. How could the girl, attractive, though not beautiful, be a product of the slums? But there was good blood in her veins, perhaps that accounted for it. Circumstances had taken her to the places of squalor and sin but she, surely, was undefiled by contact with them. For all her slang, uncouthness of speech and strange ways of expression she bore evidence of fineness that unhealthful environment could not take from her. She was worthy of efforts to help and certainly she had a right to a happy girlhood.

Aunt Sybilla's voice broke into the reverie of the man: "Sarah, where in the world did you get to?"

The man and girl turned to the house. Aunt Sybilla stood at the kitchen door waiting for them.

"Sarah, this long time a'ready I called you that it's time to peel potatoes. Next your grandpap will get home and no meal made yet. Howdedo, Mr. Snavelly," she greeted her neighbor, "did you get back from your trip?" Her voice was none too cordial. She didn't think much of "them 'Piscopals" and wondered why he wanted to talk with Sarah.

"Yes, thank you," he answered complacently. "I was getting acquainted with your niece."

"So. I guess you was surprised too."

"Greatly. I have been telling her she should come to Sunday school and meet some of the young people of the town then she can have a much better time."

"Umph," Aunt Sybilla evidently did not agree. "I guess Sarah won't have much time to be runnin' round. It's the idle hands get in mischief."

"Yes," added the girl, "but the busy ones go the fastest when the devil gets them won over."

Aunt Sybilla frowned at the mention of the ruler of the lower regions. Her look spoke unmistakably that she thought the girl needed a strong hand over her. Sarah laughed, said good-bye to the neighbor and went in to peel the potatoes while the man vaulted across the hedge that divided the side yards.

As Sarah worked in the kitchen doing the menial tasks necessary to the preparation of a meal her thoughts were far above such common things as potatoes or ham. Romance burned brightly within her starved heart, some legacy from the Irish actress mother invested every minor shred of it with glory. The meeting with the rector was an event in her life, which however colorful it had been, still lacked the girl and boy romances most people of her age had experienced. During her years of adolescence when thrills and quickening heart beats are a portion of each day Sarah, secluded in the mountain reformatory, had never felt the stirring of girlhood romances save as they came to her through reading the books Miss Hughes had wisely given her—Tennyson, Dickens, Riley, and many others which can safely be placed into the hands of receptive youth. Sarah had read and reread them eagerly; her heart sang as she learned the story of the knights or followed the varied experiences of Sydney Carton, Tiny Tim, David Copperfield and a score of other Dickensonian favorites. But, after all, that was mere reading, tame and colorless compared with flesh and blood heroes. And the Reverend James Snavely was all that could be desired in the way of a real hero so far as appearance and personality went. Mothers of eligible daughters sighed and manœvered but so far the rector

of St. Paul's had proven impregnable. Courteous, charming, delightfully cordial to all, showing no favoritism to any, he went about his work in the little parish.

James Snavelly was, as he had proudly told Sarah, Pennsylvania Dutch, a splendid example of a polished, educated one. But the polish had not marred his genuine, wholesome qualities, it had rather accentuated and intensified them, so that all the innate sterling of him shone from his life. But the little town of Fairview gave no special heed to the man. Of course the people respected him and liked him for his smiling, unaffected greetings to them, praised his finest oratorical efforts as "pretty good preachin'" and sometimes wondered why he didn't try to get a church in some city and earn bigger money. That was a natural query for there he might have expanded and become a power, but the hold of his own was strong upon him. There was, in his thoughts, no place quite so lovely or desirable as Lancaster County, and there he chose to work in the little parish with a handful of people who liked him. And so, without any of the spectacular about him to force attention, he went about every day doing the work of the parish, reading the prayers, burying the dead, uniting in holy matrimony, serving without any desires for wider spheres, knowing, as would all of his profession might know!—that there is no limit to the scope of a man's work, that the results of honest endeavor can and do overflow the bounds of the narrow parish. Like Tennyson's expression of it, "Our echoes roll from soul to soul, and grow forever and forever."

The Reverend James Snavelly had lived most of his boyhood in the same little town where later he came to preach. Perhaps that was a mistake on his part, for

though familiarity does not always breed contempt it has a strong tendency to lessen proper deference.

Who in Fairview did not know of the time the young Jimmie Snively put a tick-tack on an old maid's window one merry Hallowe'en and was rewarded by a pitcher of water spilled upon his head? If you chanced to remember that one morning while he was expounding the Gospel could you think seriously about sufferings of the Children of Israel? Then there was that oft-repeated story of the incident in High School when some fool question debate, namely, "Resolved that Lincoln was a greater man than Washington," was on in the weekly Literary Society Friday afternoon. Jimmie had heard the pros and cons and mentally thought the pupils were talking through their hats, trying to take lustre from one great man and shine up the other with it when each had all any one man could carry. Then came the moment of general debate and the decisive time when a standing vote was taken. "All those in favor of the affirmative please rise" and some of the scholars scrambled to their feet. "All those in favor of the negative please rise" and the remaining pupils rose, all except Jimmie. He sat tight during both uprisings. The president of the day demanded, "Mr. Snively, you did not rise for either side. We want to know what you decided."

Jimmie's answer has been immortalized in Fairview—"I decided to set still!"

Called to account by an outraged principal he answered wisely, "When you can tell me whether man is superior to woman, food more necessary than water, the stars more beautiful than the moon, then I'll tell you whether Lincoln was a greater man than Washington."

The same sane reasoning characterized him when he

was grown to manhood. It was to this far-off, seemingly inaccessible star that Sarah Burkhart, the child of Red Rose Court and Sunset Mountain, hitched her little wagon. Here was a man she wanted to know better, coveted for a friend. In that brief interview, unconventional and illuminating, she had been cognizant of a natural, unavoidable prejudice toward her—or was it mere wariness? To him, no less than to the others of the town, she was that heretic, rebel, if not a thing to flout, then a person who required changing and improving before meriting close intimacy. She remembered Mrs. Maloney's words that if you wanted a thing hard enough you'd get it *if you went after it!* Somehow it did not seem preposterous or presuming to covet the friendship of a man like the Reverend Snavelly. Perhaps some appreciation of her own power and latent possibilities was uppermost in her heart that April day as she worked in the kitchen with the solemn Aunt Sybilla. A bit of Tennyson she loved came to her:

“I have heard that, somewhere in the main,
Fresh-water springs come up through bitter brine.”

Was it ever possible that through the acrid life she had known the sweet waters of love would rise to sweeten her whole being?

“Here!” came her aunt's stern warning, “you peel them potatoes too thick! That ain't no way, throwin' half the good out with the skin. That's how lots of people do and then they never get nowheres.”

“I'm sorry.”

“Well, don't do it no more. Bein' sorry when it's spoiled won't fix the potatoes.”

"No—yes—I mean I'll be careful."

The woman looked at her. "What makes you talk so ferhuddled? Anyhow, what was you and that preacher doin', talkin' about in our lot? What did he come over here for?"

"To see the cherry blossoms, I suppose," was the innocent reply.

"Ach," she gave a disgusted look at the girl. "I guess he could seen them from his side of the fence. I tell you, you better not begin makin' a fuss with him, for his members would hate to have it. He's a preacher and got to be careful how he acts for there are so many always watchin' preachers. Course, he's only a 'Piscopal one and I think still they are like the Catholics, only the name is different."

"Oh, no!" protested the girl, but it fell on deaf ears.

"Mrs. Roth, she goes to that church and she told me a'ready how they do, bowing and gettin' up and down all the time, rutchin' round in church like that! It wonders me if the 'Piscopal preachers can't make up no prayers or why they always read them out a little book, that ain't the Bible, neither! But then some churches got funny ways. I'm glad ourn hasn't."

Sarah smiled, thinking how extremely queer and novel the Mennonite service had been to her. It was all a matter of perspective, she told herself.

"Anyhow," went on the woman, "I don't want you to begin gettin' notions about boys. Mr. Snively he's a man, lots too old for you, so that don't worry me only what his members would say if they seen you and him together a lot. But boys, like Dan Roth, you better leave them alone. It ain't no good to start anything like that for half the time it brings you trouble."

"You think," Sarah sang,

"Men are deceivers ever,
One foot on land and one on sea.
To one thing constant never.'"

"Well, I never heard it sang like that but I guess it's not far from true. There ain't many good men like your grandpap no more."

And the woman sighed and looked so sad that Sarah felt she had a clue to that twenty-year trouble that had soured her. Some love story with an unhappy ending! That was it! Poor Sybilla! She hoped when her love story came it would end, "They lived happy ever after."

CHAPTER XI

WORK AND PLAY

WHEN Sarah sat down to her supper that day she was still thinking about her new acquaintance. Then the importance of sitting around the table with her own family overshadowed all lesser interests and she gave herself up to the enjoyment of the meal.

Meal-time in the Burkhart home had been a revelation to the newcomer. Six years in a reformatory where the food was cooked in great quantities and distributed in platefuls had not taught her much about the manner of eating in a private home. Sometimes she had walked with Miss Hughes along the little street at the foot of Sunset Mountain at supper time and seen through the windows of the lighted room a family or two seated round a small table. At such times her heart had ached poignantly. Oh, to be one of the group! But each time she had gone back to the big dining-room on the hill and taken her place at the long table with twenty-odd other girls.

The days of sojourn in her new home had brought her many experiences that warmed her heart but none dearer than the half hour spent each meal-time. True, her grandfather and aunts ate in the kitchen instead of using the big dining-room whose corner cupboard with lovely old-fashioned dishes proclaimed it the proper place for the family meals, but the table in the kitchen was always laden with a variety of dishes, made after infallible, ancient Pennsylvania Dutch recipes, that the girl liked

to hear the call for meals. Then she flattered herself that her presence at the table added life to the party. They needed it badly enough, goodness knows, she told herself. The meals were far too solemn affairs! Sometimes grandfather had some bit of news he had gathered at the store, Aunt Mary found a few pleasant things to recount, and even Aunt Sybilla, under the softening influence of home-made crullers and pie thought of something to say, but there was no sustained conversation unless Sarah took the helm. She would have enjoyed discussing topics of the day but all efforts to do so met with frosty answers from Aunt Sybilla who immediately started to speak about the necessity of buying new sheets. Did Mary know that the towels were down to twenty and that mom always tried to keep two dozen of everything in the house for you never know when there might be sickness or something and you'd hate to have the neighbors come in and find you were short on anything. Didn't Mary think they ought to get at making some real soon?

After a few days Sarah entered into the spirit of the family and grew to like the homely topics spoken about at the table. Their very prosaicness attracted her and she felt more like one of the family to hear them than if the topic had been a summary of the news in the daily paper.

That April evening when Aunt Sybilla turned to her and asked, "What do you think of the new coffee? I got it for only twenty-eight cents at that new cheap store just opened. I think it's as good as the thirty-cent coffee we got so long. What's the use throwin' away two cents every time you buy a pound of coffee if this is just as good!"

Sarah had a hard time to keep from declaring that the coffee tasted like nectar and ambrosia to her after they had deigned to ask her opinion of it but she merely answered, "It's fine, Aunt Sybilla! But I suppose I'm not much of a judge; any coffee would taste good to me for I never got it on the mountain."

"What, no coffee!" The woman looked aghast, something like pity showing in her face at the thought of what she considered the girl's deprivation. "Then I guess you got to do like the hired man mom used to tell about still—when he worked any place where they didn't give him coffee at noon he always drank an extra cup at supper to make up for it."

Sarah laughed. She was beginning to feel more at home with these strange people who were her own. After all, they were good to her, as good as they knew how to be. But her grandfather, how stern he generally looked! Would she ever learn to feel free with him! What a peculiar old man he was!

"Sarah." He startled her so she almost spilled her coffee.

"Yes, sir, I mean what is it, grandfather?"

"Ach, you needn't call me nothin' tony like that. Just grandpap will do."

"Yes, grandpap."

"Are you good at figgers?"

"Yes. The teacher at—on the mountain used to say that mathematics was my best work."

"I mean just plain figgers, like the figgerin' in the books at the store."

"I think I could do it."

"Then I wish you'd try it for me. Mebbe you can help us out for a few weeks. Dan Roth across the street

is in the office and another man, but he's goin' to California for a few weeks and I need some one to help Dan. We got a few clerks in the store but they'd mess everything up in the office and then I need them behind the counters anyway. Would you like to try it once?"

"Oh, grandpap, I'd love to! Then I'd be able to show you how grateful I am for keeping me ——"

"That's enough of such dumb talk!" The old man frowned forbiddingly. "You belong to us; ain't you Jeremiah's girl! I'll pay you to help in the store."

"Oh, no pay! When you are keeping me ——"

"Ain't I told you not to say that! I guess whoever works for me get some pay for it, relation or no relation."

"Be sure, yes," agreed Aunt Sybilla. "Pop he wouldn't have no one work for him for nothin'. That's only right."

Aunt Mary spoke up gently, "You do like your grandpap says. It will be nice to have you help him then people can see you ain't lazy, that you got some of the good in the family along with the rest—now, what a dumb way for talkin', ain't! But I didn't mean nothin' by it, only I want you to show these people you are all right. Mrs. Roth said this morning ——"

"Mary, Mrs. Roth don't always say what is the truth," her sister warned her.

"Well, anyhow she got this wrong. She said she guessed we'd be sorry yet for takin' Sarah in our home. I told her no, never!"

"Oh," cried Sarah, "I hate that woman! She's so sweet to some people and I bet she stings them every time she gets a chance. She's too sweet. Even the Irish don't laugh all the time and smile. Mrs. Maloney used

to say too much sweet was worse than too much bitter or sour, that it made you sick sooner."

Grandfather rapped on the plate with his knife. "Here, here, let's talk business instead of pullin' the neighbors to pieces. Will you come to the store to-morrow morning once, then you can find out what is to do?"

"I'll come. Got a cage, grandpap?" she asked facetiously.

"What kind of cage?" he asked, not understanding.

"For the specimen on exhibition. If I work in that little glass office in the store it will be a fine chance for the town to come in and get a good look at me without appearing to be curious."

"Ach, I guess not. Anyhow, it's my store and I dare put in it who I want."

Sarah smiled. She was thinking of what Mrs. Roth would say when she knew that her boy was working in the office with the despised granddaughter of Jeremiah Burkhart.

Dan Roth was the idol of his mother's heart, and, like many other idols, spoiled, petted and supported until his natural stamina was stultified. Like his mother he looked contemptuously upon the daughter of a convict, but the desire of youth for pleasure kept him from revealing his contempt too plainly. When Sarah came to the office to work with him and was introduced Dan was very cordial. She was, in his eyes, attractive; her manner of carrying her head, chin up, put him on his mettle. By heaven, he'd like to make her drop it a bit! Dan was an admirer of the fair sex and the fairer they were the better he liked them, and the haughtier they acted the more he prided himself when he won their interest. Then there was a tantalizing winsomeness about the new girl that

roused his desire to know her better. Here he saw an opportunity to amuse himself, pass the hours in the store more pleasantly, without having any unpleasant scenes after he grew tired of the amusement. True, she was the relative of old man Jeremiah, but doubtless an unwelcome member of the family, and so long as only an innocent flirtation took place no one would call him to account if he did hurt the heart of the girl a bit. Here was a chance to dance without having to pay the fiddler later. For no one would expect a boy like Dan to be seriously interested in a girl who had been in a reformatory. So Dan Roth was at once pleasant and obliging and so friendly that Sarah at once became suspicious.

The first noon he walked home from the store with her and they loitered at the Burkhart gate, Sarah hoping Mrs. Roth was peeping at some window and seeing her son and heir wasting time with that dreadful Burkhart girl. Dan was thinking how expressive were the eyes of the girl near him and how merry her laughter.

After she had eaten she spied him lingering by the gate again so she roguishly slipped down through the back lot, down the alley and reached the store by another route. When he came in, barely on time, she was bent over her books.

"You"—he faced her angrily, "how did you get here?"

"Walked, of course. Did you think I hired a taxi?"

"Come off, now, don't put on airs with me. Let's be friends," he coaxed. "I want you to meet some of the crowd and have fun. This is a dead dry town but we manage to have some good times in it. Another young person and a charming one at that, will be a valuable asset."

"Asset," she laughed. "Much you know about banking terms if you call me that. Go on, you're fooling. I'm part Irish and I can tell blarney every time and can outblarney anybody, so don't try that with me."

"I mean it. I do want to be friends."

"Well, I'll think about it."

Dan mentally said, "Darn her, wonder who she thinks she is!" But aloud he repeated his desire to become friends. He gained no promise from her. "Go on, and let me do my work," she told him. "My grandfather isn't paying either of us to be galavanting."

True to her promise Sarah went to Sunday school the next week. She was placed in a class of young ladies about her own age, who smiled dutifully then ignored her. It was a new experience for Sarah. She liked the music and the beginning of the lesson talk by a woman who was educated and seemed to know her subject, but the new girl soon fell to comparing her clothes with those of the other girls and the process hurt. Of course Miss Hughes had outfitted her wonderfully well for a reformatory girl, a city charge, but those silk dresses the other girls wore made her envious. She saw how limited was her wardrobe and while the teacher went on eloquently expounding the lesson of Daniel and the lions Sarah sat with rapt attention on her own thoughts—how far her money would go toward the purchase of pretty clothes! Grandfather promised to pay her for the work at the store and she'd buy first a new hat; hers was a sight! Then she did want a pair of white kid gloves, had always wanted them since her first sight of them on the hands of others. If she ever earned enough money she'd have a silk dress and satisfy the long craving of her soul. After

her work at the store was finished she'd try to find something else to do in Fairview and earn money for clothes like the other girls wore. Of course she couldn't expect her people to dress her like that!

The teacher's pleased, "You are a very attentive scholar, Miss Burkhart," made the girl say to herself, "Sarah, you're a darned hypocrite!"

She smiled her sweetest at the thought and several of the girls grudgingly admitted to themselves that she was real attractive when she smiled; if only she were the right sort she might be lots of fun to know. One girl, less subservient to opinion or dictates of her elders, Mary Becker, was openly friendly to the new member of the class. She could afford to be. Her father was president of the bank, her mother head of the town aristocracy, her brother one of the town physicians and Mary herself a student at Vassar and accustomed to take the law into her own hands on many occasions. Oh, Mary might defy parental instructions and still lose no prestige; her family was too firmly established at the top. But the other girls of the class were not so cordial. True, some of them shook hands with Sarah and said they hoped she could come every Sunday, but she saw they did not really want to say it, knowing how wicked it was to lie. She felt herself accepted on sufferance. One by one they drifted away after the session, started off down the street in happy groups and Sarah walked alone to her home. A grim determination rose in her. She would make them like her. She could give as clever answers to the questions as those girls—why some of them knew lots less than she! She would prove to them that even if she was reared in an atmosphere totally diverse from that in which they had basked during childhood she was just as

human, lovable, tender as they, and not one whit less worthy the friendship of noble persons.

"I'll make them love me yet!" she determined. "I'll go to that Sunday school every week and enter into their affairs until I can't be ignored."

For several weeks there was no appreciable increase in warmth in the manners of the other girls of the class to the newcomer. Neither did any young people of the town call or pay any attention to the girl at Jeremiah Burkhart's house. Only Dan Roth showed any desire to be friendly and she kept him at arm's length, so that he said frequently, "Darn her, wonder who she thinks she is!" She refused his invitations to go for ice-cream at the drug store or to walk about the town on a fine April evening. "I'm keeping Lent," she told him, "and deprive myself of all such pleasures." But he knew she was making sport of him.

Easter came late that year. Jeremiah Burkhart paid his help every week so just before Easter he handed Sarah ten dollars. "Your pay up to Easter, thought you might like it to spend some. I'll pay you more if you stay and earn more."

"Grandpap, the first money I ever earned! It's really mine?"

"You earned it," he said matter-of-factly.

"I may spend it?"

"Folks generally dare spend their own money." But his eyes smiled as he looked into the eager face of the girl. Perhaps some memory of the days when his wife had been young like that stirred in him. "You just do what you want with it," he told her kindly.

Sarah wished he would pat her head or kiss her or do something to show he liked her. But he was parsimoni-

ously chary with demonstrations of affection and Sarah had to be satisfied with the smile.

"Look, Aunt Mary, Aunt Sybilla," she cried as she ran to the kitchen, "this is what grandpap gave me and he says I may spend it if I want."

"Now," spoke up Sybilla the practical, "if I was you I'd put it to bank till you got more then take out a certificate and draw interest every year and that way you can get a nice nest-egg together."

"No," protested the girl. "I am going to spend it. I want a new hat and I've longed for white kid gloves till it hurt."

"White kid gloves, like a pall-bearer, eh? You needn't spend no ten dollars for a hat and them silly gloves!" Such extravagance was almost criminal, thought Sybilla. If the girl was going to be improvident it would take a lot of money to keep her.

Aunt Mary intervened. "Sybilla, let the girl do what she wants with the money. She worked for it. She ain't young more than once and if she wants a new hat and gloves ——"

"Well, I'll ask pop to-night if she dare spend money so, go on like she had a barrel of it."

But Sarah was determined and decided to avoid further controversy by spending the ten dollars at once. She went straight to the little millinery shop up town, tried on ten hats and bought the first one she had tried on, then she marched to another store and bought her first pair of white gloves. Her blue serge suit was good; if she brushed it and laundered the white voile waist she would have an Easter outfit far grander than any she had had hitherto.

Her dream of an Easter basket in a real home, dyeing

eggs and hiding them, seemed doomed to non-fulfilment. Saturday noon came and no sign of eggs had she seen.

"You know," she told the aunts as they cleared away the dinner dishes, "I have no work at the store this afternoon and I'd dye a few eggs if I knew how."

"Dye eggs on a Saturday when the kitchen is cleaned!" Aunt Sybilla disapproved. "That's a dumb notion, to smear round with dye and then afterward you can't hardly eat the eggs for the dye gets in and colors the white. Mebbe you'd be poisoned yet."

"Mebbe we could fix some like mom used to do for us, Sarah," Aunt Mary suggested. "With onion skins and calico."

"Well, I got to go up town and if you want to make such a mess be sure to clean up after." And Sybilla left the two foolish persons alone in the kitchen.

"Are we really going to dye eggs?" asked Sarah.

"Be sure yes, if you want to. I ain't done it in years. Run up to the back room and get the patch bag and I'll get things ready. Oh, and fetch some big onions from the garret, some with nice brown skins."

Sarah flew up the stairs, a blessed feeling of belonging to Aunt Mary racing with her. She gathered up some onions in her skirt, lugged the heavy patch bag down the stairs, panting, "Oh, this is more fun than a circus."

She watched and helped the aunt as the onion skins were put on to boil and the eggs dipped in the colored liquid. "Oh, aren't they pretty!" She was pleased as a little child.

"You just wait once till you see them dyed in the calico!"

Sarah watched the woman as she selected scraps of bright goods, crimson with yellow sprigs, yellow with

maroon figures, vivid greens, gay blues, and then in every scrap was tied an egg and the whole placed into boiling water and left to bubble away on the stove. When the eggs were removed from the calico the pattern and color of the goods was left upon them.

Sarah squealed with delight. "Who ever would think of that!"

The eggs were all rubbed with lard to make them glossy and then laid in a dish, ready for the morrow.

When Sybilla came home she found the kitchen in order and the finished eggs on the table. "Um, got done soon. But it wonders me that a big girl like you wants to do such baby things. Why, you are too big for such foolishness."

The girl's eyes filled. "I never had them when I was the proper age for them. I wanted to know just once how it felt to color Easter eggs and hunt for an Easter basket in the morning. I guess I am too old. I won't want to do it next year, but this once was fun."

Aunt Mary wiped her eyes on her apron and mentally vowed that the girl should have her Easter nest in the morning. So when Sarah awoke on the first Easter in her own home and went down-stairs she was greeted with, "Now hunt your nest."

"Oh, really? Did you fix one for me?"

"Yes, but you got to find it."

Sarah began the search, having much fun and laughing often as the most likely places proved false alarms. At last she found it under the kitchen table in an old-fashioned brown basket Aunt Mary had brought from the attic. Scraps of bright tissue paper lined it and upon them were the lovely calico and onion eggs and a few chocolate ones Aunt Mary had bought.

Sarah ran to her and throwing an arm about her neck, kissed her warmly on the cheek. Then she looked abashed at her own boldness but the woman laughed. "You dare do that whenever you want, Sarah. I like you and I wish I could give you everything you didn't get when you was little."

"Oh, you dear!" cried the girl, but further expressions of understanding were cut off by the appearance of Jeremiah Burkhart.

"What's all the racket about?" he asked rather sternly. "I heard Sarah laugh before I got up a'ready."

"Oh, grandpap," she held out her basket, "see what Aunt Mary fixed for me!"

"Well, that ain't nothin' to make so much fuss about. It's Sunday," he added in a tone of reproof.

"Yes," the girl said, "Sunday and Easter and if ever there was a day to be glad on it's this one!"

Such rank opposition and defiance left the man speechless. He wondered again, what manner of girl was this? Would she ever grow into the mould he thought she would have to fit?

The rebuff of the man left Sarah subdued. After all, he was right, Easter baskets were for children. No amount of them could make up to her the lack of them when they were due her.

That Easter was an ideal day, greatly to the delight of the young girls who had beautiful silk dresses to initiate.

Sarah donned her blue suit, the white waist, freshly ironed, pulled the new hat at the right angle on her black hair, pinned to her coat a bunch of fragrant white violets Aunt Mary had allowed her to pick from the grassy place in the yard where they were abundant, then she was ready for church.

Easter in the Episcopal Church brings a beautiful, inspiring service. The scent of lilies was heavy in the little church of St. Paul. The soft bustle of arriving attendants, the whispers, and then the processional, the music and the measured march of the choir boys. She thought she had never heard anything more beautiful than the tenor solo, "Open the Gates of the Temple." At the words, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and because He lives I too shall live," her heart throbbed in answering faith. Oh, it was wonderful to be in that church on that day! She looked at the colored windows, turned to listen to the words of the Reverend Snavelly as he told the Easter story, and suddenly, as the passage of a bird, there stole into her heart a feeling of unhappiness—her father—in what dark corner was he languishing that bright day? What songs of hope was he hearing? Oh, to have him with her in that church! She resolved to speak to her grandfather about him, though he had forbidden her to mention the name of the one who was paying the penalty of his misdeeds.

After the service the rector shook hands with her, several others spoke to her, but she had no mind then for the likes or dislikes of the Fairview people. Her whole thought was of her father and what she was going to say about him to her grandfather.

Her grandfather had already returned from the service in the Mennonite Church and sat on the back porch while the aunts prepared the dinner.

It was almost May. A few lingering cherry blossoms still made white splashes on the trees, apple buds showed pink on the big tree in the yard, where a provident robin was already building his nest on a broad crotch. Grandfather seemed to be watching the bird who, knowing

no Sabbath, was carrying threads and grass to the tree.

"Grandpap!" The girl sat beside him.

"Well, I see you got your finery on. Worked almost two weeks for it and spent it all in ten minutes, eh?" he said, not unkindly.

"Yes—but, grandpap, I want to talk to you. You told me never to bring it up again when you are here but I must! It's about father——"

"I told you ——"

"I must, grandpap." Her distress was so evident that he suffered her to go on. "Won't you forgive him? Won't you tell him you do? Think of him in that awful place and we here in this yard."

"Sarah, the Book says that what a man sows he must reap."

"I know. But it says more. I heard it this morning. You know the Lord's Prayer. It says, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.' If God took us at our word when we say that we'd have a pretty hard time, all of us, wouldn't we, grandpap?"

"Eh? What do you mean? You mean I ain't done right by the boy? I trained him right and tried to make a good man out him but he went his way and what he got is what he earned."

"But, grandpap, don't you ever stop to think that even if he does deserve all he is getting how dreadful it must be for him? How he must feel sorry about it and wish he had done as you tried to teach him, stick to the honest way. They said the Apostles' Creed in church to-day—guess you know it too. When they came to that part, 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins,' I wondered how many really acted as if they do believe that. Oh, they believe

in the forgiveness of *their* sins, but what about the sins of others? Father will be out of that place in a few years and then I want him to be with me and I want to be with you, and how are we going to fix it if you won't make up with him?"

"We'll cross our bridges when we come to them," said the old man, but there were smouldering fires in his eyes the girl had never seen there before. She hoped she had touched some chord of responsiveness in his heart. But he sat, chin resting on his cane, his eyes hidden from the girl. Aunt Sybilla came then to call her to change her dress and help dish the dinner and the matter of her father was dropped. Her heart was heavy. After all, she found, what availed a new hat and coveted white gloves if the heart was heavy? She had learned the first step in the appreciation of the littleness of *things*. Things—what joy would diamonds, silk dresses, all purchasable things bring her when her spirit was troubled! It was an hour of deep discernment and education, but an unhappy one.

During the days that followed Jeremiah Burkhart did not refer to the forbidden subject of the criminal. His face was set and stern, as though he were wearing a mask to hide his real feeling. So far as he was concerned it was once more a closed matter, requiring no further action or discussion. The girl wondered if his heart was still as hard to his son, whether he could much longer ignore the very existence of him. But she forbore to question him. Every day she went to the office and in her work there she greatly pleased her grandfather, who frankly told her as he would have been equally frank to find fault if that had been necessary.

So the days passed in the new home. After store

hours Sarah helped her aunts in the house, sometimes in the garden. Her love of optimistic poetry helped her through some days that had else been dreary. Her Irish strain showed her the funny, glad side to everything, so that to all appearances she was happy. At least, she told herself, she was learning lots of things. And she was, adding new circles of growth like the exogenous rings of a tree.

Quite by accident she stumbled upon the mystery of Aunt Sybilla's twenty-year trouble. One evening at supper she said, "Oh, I met the nicest man in the store today. He came to me and asked, 'Are you Jeremiah's granddaughter?' and when I told him I had that honor he looked me over, put out his hand, and said he'd like to shake hands with me, that he knew my father and liked him and felt so sorry things had happened the way they did. I couldn't feel hurt because he was so fatherly about it. He's the nicest man I met in a long while."

"Yes? Who was he?" asked Aunt Mary.

"He said his name is Jake Herr ——"

At the words her grandfather looked up, Mary uttered a soft, "Sh!" and the girl glanced at Aunt Sybilla—her face was pale. There was the secret of the long-standing trouble, Sarah knew. So it was that nice man had broken the heart of Aunt Sybilla—she could scarcely credit it.

Sarah tactfully changed the subject of conversation but the thing lingered in her mind. She was relieved that evening when Aunt Mary came into her room and offered explanations.

"I guess you thought we acted funny at the table when you said that about Jake Herr, but I'll tell you about it. You guess there's something and it's better to know than

to guess. Sybilla and Jake was goin' to marry once when she was a girl. He was a nice boy, worked on his pop's farm and we thought he would make her a good man. He saved his money and bought a little place out from the town for him and Sybilla to go to farmin'. Well, one thing Sybilla was set against was drinkin'. She used to say when she was just little that she'd never marry a man who drank. A month before they was to be married Jake got drunk and somebody came and told her. She asked him and he said it was so, but that he wouldn't do it again. But that settled it for Sybilla. She felt she could never trust him after that and they didn't get married. Sybilla never forgave him, said he ruined her life, made her so she'd never believe any man except pop. Everybody said Jake would go to the bad then for sure but he didn't. He got his sister to come keep house for him, he run the farm and hasn't been drunk since that anybody knows. He first used to try to get her to forgive him and make up so they would marry, but she acted so funny to him that he give up trying that. Now they don't look at each other when they get to the same Meeting House, and if anybody says his name it hurts her. She won't ever get over it, I guess, but sometimes I have to pity Jake, for I think he would made her a good husband. Sybilla and pop are alike in that, they find it so hard to forgive when somebody does something to them. Poor Jake is still workin' his farm and keepin' sober, and I wonder sometimes if he still thinks she might look at him again some day. But I guess she's been carryin' her trouble too long to do that. It's too bad, now, when people make such a mixup of their life, ain't?"

"Yes, I think Aunt Sybilla is foolish. If the man has proved he is over that and still likes her—oh, I think she

is mighty foolish! But I suppose she has carried her trouble so long that she wouldn't be happy without it."

"Ach what? That's a funny way to put it, but now, mebbe for all, it might be true. Only never say nothin' about Jake when she is here or tell her I told you, for she would be put out."

The discovered romance of the grim old aunt veiled her in a new interest to Sarah. So that was what she had read about—disappointed in love! How dreadful! Did it leave its marks on everybody as it had on Aunt Sybilla? She would try to be more companionable with the aunt since she knew the sorrow of her heart.

"Aunt Sybilla," she asked her one day, "where did you get your name? Were you named for anybody? I never heard it before."

"No? Well, I guess there's more things you never heard of. But me, I was named out the Almanac."

"The Almanac!" Here was something new.

"Ach, yes, didn't you never hear about that? Lots of us Pennsylvania Dutch get named that way. When there's a new baby they look up that date in the Almanac and if the name that's long side the date is one that suits they give it to the baby. I know lots of people named like that. There's Cletus Longenecker, Sabina Miller, Donatus Hilton, and me. I was born on April 29. Wait once." She brought the Almanac as evidence. "See, here it is, April 29, Sybilla."

Sarah looked over the pages of the Agricultural Almanac, the infallible friend of the Pennsylvania Dutch, many of whom still cling to the ways of their parents and plant their gardens, pickle their beets, make their sauerkraut, slip their geraniums, by the signs of the Almanac depicted in drawing and explained in words.

"Oh, what queer names!" exclaimed the girl. "Aunt Sybilla, just suppose you had been born January 4, then you'd be named Methusalem! Or on February 10 and you'd gotten Scholastica, or April 15 would have brought you Olympia."

"Ach, that's too dumb to talk of. I guess then they'd called me Lizzie or Katie or some such nice name. I don't like fancy names. I think sometimes mine is a little too fancy. I like plain ones like the dresses I wear."

"Yes—you like to wear those plain clothes?" Sarah felt bold in asking but she had often wondered whether the women who were garbed in the severely plain dresses really enjoyed life in them. They appeared to.

"Me? Well, I guess I do! I wouldn't wear none of them fussy dresses for nothin'! Me and Mary both started plain when we was young, before the vanities of the world got a good hold on us. It saves wonderful much, too; for we can wear the same style one year after another. Mom was plain too."

"I see." Sarah felt a reverence as she thought of the sweet woman her father had called "The sweetest woman, the dearest mother in the world." Of course there must be some peace afforded to the wearers of the plain garb, some secret calm and satisfaction that followers after the styles of the world could not know.

She changed the subject. "Aunt Sybilla, don't you ever think the Pennsylvania Dutch say funny things?"

"No, be sure not. What's funny about the way we talk? Guess it ain't different from the way you do."

"Sometimes it is. I went to the store the other day and the old woman said, 'I guess Fairview gives a city soon with so many new houses goin' up.'"

"Well, what's funny about that? Guess it will soon give a city."

"Oh, nothing," said Sarah, hiding a smile. "I guess it must be myself that's funny. I can laugh at nothing, you know. A woman came in the store then and told about the trip she and her husband took last winter and it was so cold in the train that he 'walked the car up and down to keep warm.'"

"You think that's funny?" Aunt Sybilla failed to see the humor of it.

"No, but I bet he kept warm all right." Sarah's face dimpled.

"Ach, I guess that was old Bevy Warner; she and her man goes away in all kinds of weather still. She's dumb, so dumb as Brenner's bull."

"How dumb was he?"

"So dumb he waded through the crick to get a drink of water!"

A gay peal of laughter rang out and Aunt Sybilla irresistibly joined in it. "You stop now," she ordered, "next with your dumb laughin' all the time you make me get like you, laughin' at nothin'."

"Oh, if I could!" Sarah clapped her hands.

"Well, I guess not! I don't want to get that way. You behave yourself now."

Verily the girl was a changeling, but her infectious laugh soon came to be an accepted thing in the old house and if it had become silent the three older people would have wondered at the quiet. Sarah was becoming acclimated to Fairview. What though the young people, with the exception of Mary Becker, seldom looked her way when she was looking theirs, the children of the street answered her smiles and ran beside her as she went to

and fro. She could bide her time and, like the patient man in Riley's poem, all things would come to her some day.

The friendship with the rector next door progressed slowly. Several times in as many weeks they exchanged commonplace remarks over the back fence. "That friendship he talked about moves about as fast as a glacier," she thought, "but small favors are gratefully received by the needy so I should be satisfied. I don't wonder he balks at intimacy with the daughter of a convict and all the rest of my pedigree. I can't expect him to swallow all that at one gulp and look pleasant during the ordeal. But life is moving. I have a home and family and I could be as happy as an ant in a sugar barrel if it were not for poor father. Guess I'll write to him for that seems to be all I can do for him at present."

CHAPTER XII

LETTERS

DEAR FATHER:

You see by the heading that I'm in Fairview! Wish I could tell you just what that means to me after all those years of wondering who and where my people are. Of course they were surprised to see me, for they did not know I was on the face of the earth. Aunt Mary is the dearest body! I look at her and like to remember you told me your mother, my grandmother, was like that. But grandfather scares me a little; he's so sober and quiet. I never met any one like him. No longer can I boast, "I ain't afraid of nobody nor nothing but snakes," for I am sometimes afraid of Jeremiah Burkhart!

The first day I was there a neighbor came in to see who the company might be. It was—can you guess who?—Mrs. Roth! She said she went to school with you. I'd like to bet she tattled even then. She's a gossip, the kind tells you a lurid tale about somebody and follows it up with, "But don't repeat it." No, of course *you* are not to repeat it, let *her* do it! She has the loveliest time going from house to house gathering and dispensing news for, as Miss Hughes says, "A dog that'll fetch a bone will carry one away." I dare say nobody escapes the tongue of Mary Ann Roth. There's a son, too, who works in grandfather's store. The only thing his head is fit for is to use for a hat-rack. He thought he could have some fun with me and make a fool out of Sarah Burkhart. I'm like Mrs. Maloney; she used to say that as long as

the Lord didn't make a fool out of her she'd be hanged if she'd let any one else do it.

I guess you remember how lovely the old house is. Oh, father, if you could be here it would be glorious! The big rooms and everything clean and sweet! Aunt Sybilla and Aunt Mary are wonderful housekeepers. I believe most of these funny people called Pennsylvania Dutch are. All the yards and porches and what I can see of their houses look neat as a new pin. Do you remember the cherry trees in the lot? But perhaps these are new ones. At any rate, they are blooming now and if Japan has anything prettier in the way of cherry blossoms you'd have to take me over to prove it. I climb up and sit there and just laugh because I'm so glad cherries have to bloom before they can be cherries! Aunt Sybilla works in the garden a lot and when I told her I like to do it she seemed pleased. She gave me a hoe and so forth and I have had plenty chance to dig and weed.

I certainly am glad you told me who my people are. Now I feel I belong to somebody. Aunt Mary says she is glad, too, but the other two haven't expressed any such feeling as yet! Bet they do notice the presence of a lively young person about the house, though. I am that, for I can't easily be anything else. I break into some kind of noise about every five minutes. One of my nice habits is singing. I think Aunt Sybilla got nervous at first when I washed the dishes to the tune of Killarney or sang Macushla when I swept the kitchen, but I pretended not to see her frowns and kept right on. Now I bet she'd miss my warbling if I should stop. She never sings, at least not when I can hear it. Guess she must be the kind that will die with all her music in her—alas! Now if she had to boil the breakfast eggs she wouldn't

sing, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," one verse for soft and two for hard! Her chant would probably be:

"A-a few-oo-oo more ye-ye-ars shall ro-ll,
 A-a few-oo-oo more sea-ea-ea-sons come,
 And we-e-e shall be-e-e with-th those that re-st
 A-a-sle-e-ep with-in the tomb."

By the time that verse would be half sung the eggs would be hard!

I am not making fun of the way she'd sing, for I can't sing a little bit, I just bubble over like a teakettle, but it makes me feel better clean through. Then I laugh a lot. There is something funny everywhere to laugh about, it strikes me. One Sunday in Mennonite Church I got to thinking what a funny thing a handkerchief was, and I started to laugh. When I told Aunt Sybilla after we got home she couldn't see why that made me laugh. I rather suspect she thought I had a screw loose. If ever I make her laugh, a loud, merry laugh, I'll chalk it in the chimney. One day when it rained I sang and she asked me what in the world I could find to sing about on a rainy day. I said I had some robin in me. But the words of the song did not please her. It was that pretty one about, "It is not raining rain to me, it's raining daffodils." She wanted to know what dumb talk that was, how could it rain daffodils? When I said it was just a poet's imagination she informed me that her granny knew as much as that poet then, for she remembered how that old lady had said, when it rained after a dry spell in summer, that it was raining potatoes or corn. Aunt Sybilla has little respect for poets, but she is funny at times, more so because she has no idea she is funny.

Between this letter and the next you can imagine how

busy and interested I am in exploring my new home and learning to know my relatives. I must write to Miss Hughes and tell her all about it. She has been so good to me that even if I do find and like loads of relatives in the years to come I shall never forget her. Only for her my aunts would have a far worse specimen of humanity to reform in Sarah Burkhart. I feel sorry enough for them as it is; it must be an ordeal to think you have a quiet tomb-like house and then have a young girl come whirling in to stay. For me it's all gold and silver with rainbow round the edges; that's the Irish in me; I can see the rainbow every time.

You wrote once that you felt guilty because you took me to Red Rose Court, but I can forgive you anything, father, because you gave me an Irish mother!

With love,

SARAH.

DEAR FATHER:

I was up in the attic to-day—such a place! I imagined I felt the ghosts of many dead generations brush against me as I stood under the brown rafters, taking care, however, that my head didn't bump the ceiling! I had no idea an attic was half so romantic and spooky and nice! It gave me crawls along my spine and shivers in my shoes. I saw the spinning wheel that some grandmother, with I don't know how many greats added, used to spin the flax she herself had helped to plant and get ready for the wheel. I felt as though I were back in history to the Thirteen Original Colonies all in one minute. Then I looked around and found a copper kettle, a mold for making candles, a quilting frame, a hanging bric-à-brac shelf made of spools and a few little boards. How that ever escaped from the parlor I can't see. Isn't an attic a

most exciting place! But I wasn't sent up to investigate or enjoy it. Aunt Sybilla sent me there to get some home-made soap from a box covered with a heavy board. The first box I looked into was the wrong one but I am glad, for thereby I found some old pictures I treasure. I stole them, took them for my own, for they are pictures of you when you were a boy. When I looked through the red plush album that is set on an easel on the marble-top parlor table, I wondered whether there were no pictures of you. You can imagine how pleased I was to find some in that box in the attic. One was a woman, sweet like Aunt Mary, with a little boy by her side; the other showed the same boy a few years older, standing by a fancy gate holding a big hoop in his hand. They must have been you when you were little. So I salved my conscience by thinking nobody had a better right to them than I, and here they are in my room. At night when the door is shut and nobody can see, I take them out of my bureau drawer and stand them on the top of it. You were such a dear little fellow! Those pictures make me sad but glad at the same time.

Here's some pleasant news—I'm working in the store office for grandfather. If I were getting a thousand a month for being secretary to some millionaire I couldn't be gladder than I am here. I am really earning money. Grandfather says I'm doing well and he is paying me for the work after giving me a home. He does have a fine sense of honor. If only you two had understood each other better years ago—but what's the use of a post-mortem now?

The people of Fairview are having the time of their lives this week. Everybody in the town seems to need nails, putty or paint. Bet there won't be an unpainted

porch or a loose board in the whole town. Of all the customers in that store since I am working in that glass office! One old man who owed a bill for five years came in and asked me how much it was. He paid it, two dollars and ten cents, and he acted like he thought it was worth it to have a good look at the girl who had such a strange record. If grandfather charged admission he'd make enough to retire in a week more. But I should worry; if I'm good advertisement for the store then at least I'm good for something.

There is a rector lives next door. He is so much nicer than he sounds, just like any other human being. He says I am original and amusing and once he called me clever. I don't know how he figures that out. But he is interesting and I am glad he lives next door. Sometimes in the evening when we sit on the porch he jumps across the hedge and comes to talk with us a while. Hedges are convenient things! He sat with us several hours last evening and asked me to tell him about Sunset Mountain. Aunt Sybilla and grandfather went in after a while but Aunt Mary stuck to me like the good person she is. Once when I was telling about some of the girls I felt a tear drop from her eyes on my hands. Then I told them about Red Rose Court, the little Maloney baby and how I used to sit on the curb and hold it and try to keep it amused and not too hot, but it died just the same. The rector laid his hand on my shoulder and said something about a Madonna, but I don't know why he said that. I guess he didn't call me that—he couldn't! The ragged, dirty little youngster that was Sade then was anything but a Madonna. I was just a poor kid who loved the other ones. They had a hard time in that Court. While I was talking about it I could imagine I was right back

there, smelled the cabbage and worse things. I ran from the porch and picked a few stems of lilies-of-the-valley and poked my nose into them. When the rector asked what I was doing I told him I had to get the smell of Red Rose Court out of my head. Then he said something about the sweetness of a noble soul being more potent than the perfume of a perishable flower and that, therefore, I didn't need any lilies-of-the-valley. I didn't answer him, for I wasn't quite sure what he meant. Rectors do say things over one's head, sometimes! But I did understand the next thing he said: "Sarah, you have had a varied life but it has not spoiled you. That big, sympathizing heart of yours is all gold." I wanted to cry—coming from the Reverend Snavelly that was much to me. Then he no longer thinks I am that "heretic, rebel, a thing to flout"!

I asked him if he did. "No, no, indeed!" he told me. "I know you are not that."

I suppose it all went over Aunt Mary's head but she smiled and looked interested.

Reverend Snavelly has stacks of good books and he has told me to come over any time and help myself. If he is gone the housekeeper will show me where to get them. I have gone over several times and have always taken the precaution to wait until I saw him go up the street. Then I ran in, selected in a hurry, and was gone before the owner could return. I wonder why I act so, but something seems to make me. Guess I want to keep the neighbors from gossip. For myself it wouldn't matter much. I have so many black marks now that Fairview scratching a few more against me would not greatly concern me, but I'd rather lose my right hand than be the cause of any dark hintings against the fair name of that

man. His loan of books to me is just one of the many kind ways he has of helping others. I do devour a book! Sometimes when Aunt Sybilla calls me I don't hear her if I am reading. She refuses to believe that, says it is absolutely impossible not to hear her, but then she has never read a book of fiction in her life. I read something like this once upon a time, "If I had two loaves of bread I'd sell one and buy white hyacinths for my soul." I think that is the whole trouble with this family of mine. There is too much bread and not enough white hyacinths. But Aunt Mary could easily be won over to my way of thinking; she is after "me own heart."

I am kept rather busy. Sometimes I wonder how the place ran before I came. Those poor aunts almost work themselves to death and I know it is so unnecessary. What's the use scrubbing a porch that is clean? Why waste energy sweeping the garden walks? Why bake stacks of pies and cakes when simpler food is more wholesome? If they heard me I'd probably be called ungrateful and critical, but then it's the truth. Not that I mind working. I'm glad to do it so long as it's in my own home. Even the scrubbing seems a glorified task when I stop to think that it is the home of my ancestors and my own long-lost home that I am helping to scrub. Guess the girls that had to do it all their years aren't so crazy about it!

I must tell you about Mrs. Roth. This morning she came over. She said she was after a recipe for crullers—bet you she knew how to make them! She had seen the rector on our porch last evening and probably had a mental fit about it. If it had been her Dan she'd fetched him home by the ear! Dan tries so hard to be nice to me and if he weren't worse than an uncoated quinine pill

to swallow, I'd let him run over here and take me for sodas just to pay her back for some of the gossip she spread about me. But even the sweetness of that revenge would not pay for the ordeal of having Dan around me.

Mrs. Roth managed to bring the conversation round to the rector and I saw the crafty gleam of satisfaction steal across her face as she said, "I suppose you have heard that Reverend Snavelly has a habit of making girls care for him and then toss them over for a new face. Isn't it too bad! They say that where he went to school there were two who were positively crazy over him, that one girl had her trousseau started, thinking he meant business by his love-making and that ever so many others were dead in love with him, but he made fools of them all. If he ever tries it on any of the girls at St. Paul's he'll be asked to resign, but I guess he knows better than to do it. I often say it's a pity those attractive, magnetic men always do such tricks. Thank goodness my Dan would never do that!"

Her Dan—I never heard her speak that she didn't thank God her Dan was so honorable. But he's not dead yet. She may be living in a glass house some of these days and her bricks will do damage to her own building.

I am sorry she said that about the rector, for I like him. Of course she wouldn't dare say a lie about him. But then why should I concern myself about his affairs? He is kind to me and entertaining when he jumps across the hedge and no matter how many hearts he has broken he hasn't the ghost of a chance to break mine. So much for the rector!

Grandfather is keeping me on at the store. I'm to get more money next month. Aunt Sybilla is teaching me to

save something for a rainy day, for she says it comes to everybody and I shall be prepared for it.

They are so good to me. I earn my board, so they say, by helping with the work after the store closes and Saturday and so the money I earn is mine to spend for clothes and put to bank. It seems too funny to have a pocket-book with money in it! After six years without a blessed penny to spend I have money of my own and can buy candy or a magazine or something else entirely unnecessary. I feel like Crœsus.

I am counting the months until we can be together. Have you any plans? Shall we live in New Jersey or in your own Lancaster County? I can work and keep a home for you. Do you know you and I have never had a real one together since I can remember—that's the saddest thing! I shove it from my thoughts as far as I can but sometimes it comes back like a cat you cart away and gets home before you do. Never mind, father, we'll make up for the precious time we lost together. I am sorry you are not feeling better but hope you are much improved by this time.

I just thought of Johnny Maloney, the time his father died and the priest came to Red Rose Court to see them. Johnny as usual had a terribly dirty face and his mother rubbed her apron over it to get off the top layer. Johnny yelled and said, "I don't care who's here! I won't have my face washed with spit!" The priest laughed like anything, for he was Irish too. Hope you feel better now. I always do after I send you a letter. But when we are together again and there'll be no need of letters—then Sarah Burkhart will be the happiest girl in seven states!

With love,
SADE.

Away in New Jersey the man who read the last letter closed his eyes as if to shut out a cruel agony; his thin body shook in a spasm of pain as he lay back on his pillows, white and worn. He was dying of the White Plague! Haunting memories and torturing remorse gripped his soul.

"I can't die without seeing her!" he said at length to himself. "I must write to her. The poor child—it will be a sorrow for her, but youth recovers quickly and then—I'm thinking dying will be the best thing I've done in many years." A little later he called a nurse and asked for writing materials. Then he began a letter, not to Sarah, but to the father whose face he had not seen in many years.

DEAR FATHER:

I scarcely know whether I have the right to call you that or if you wish me to do so, but we can't get away from the fact that you are my father, no matter how I have disgraced the name you gave me. And I have done that. Sarah can tell you more than you want to know about me. I shudder when I think of what the child was exposed to during those years in the slums—how can I expect to be forgiven? But what I am writing about is this—I am out of jail, pardoned and in a hospital—to die! I decided not to tell the poor child, to let her be happy and go on dreaming of our little home, but somehow I can't do it. Consumption has me in its clutches and the doctors say I have just a little while longer to live. Sarah has written such sweet letters to me—if you knew what they mean to me! To have kept her love and devotion through all my sins is more than I could have hoped for and yet, if there be any spark of

repentance in me, any of the good lights my mother kindled in my heart, their survival is due to the great pure heart of Sarah, who has in her make-up all that is noble and fine of my mother and her own. I can't do less than tell her the truth so that the shock of my death will not be too sudden. I'd like to live just for her sake, that the little home she had dreamed of might be real, but it can't be. She has written to me about the old home, how wonderful it seems to her, how kind you are to her. Oh, father, don't be too hard on her, too strict! She is young and the ways of youth are changed from the time when you were young. Don't be too strict! I can't blame my wasted life on you. It was my fault, and mine alone, for I was always weak of will and did not try to grow strong. So long as my wife lived and I had her to lean on I was all right, but when trouble came my way I tottered. That is my fault, I admit it. But, father, I do say you were wrong in turning against me because I married the girl I did. I want to say I was never sorry for one minute that I married her. That's the one thing I do not regret. She was as good and fine as ever walked this old world. But I am ashamed I brought disgrace on you and Sarah, her child and mine. I know how you always upheld your honor, how you wanted, above all else, to keep the Burkhart name free from shame. I am sorry I failed you there. I ask your forgiveness for all the sorrow I have caused you, not for marrying the girl I did, but for the sins I committed after she died. My last favor I ask from you—may I come home to die? Will you deny me that? I thought this morning of the roses that used to grow by the kitchen door, against the porch rail, and scent the whole place in June. Each morning as I ran down for breakfast and the open door let in the sunlight

I smelled the roses first thing. I never seem to have gotten that smell out of my nostrils. Father, I want to see the old place once more. The gardens, the flower-beds with the swept, weeded earthen walks between, the old trees I used to climb, and the house—oh, how I have longed to wander through it! Even the parlor with its haircloth sofa and the plush album on the marble-top table would look fine to me. And the girls and you—there is something binds us to our own no matter how far we roam or how little we deserve the kindness. But the roses call me most these June days. I think if I could bury my face in them I'd die happier. Somehow they make me feel again more like the innocent boy who used to think his father, though strict, was the best father in all the wide world. We have both wandered far from those old days of confidence and love but I am hoping we can have a few before I go. If you can find it possible to forgive me and let me come home—I can't write what it will mean to me. If not, then send Sarah to me that I may see her once more,

Your son,

JERRY.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRODIGAL

JEREMIAH BURKHART looked long at the letter of his son. So the boy was dying—dying, and he asked forgiveness and the privilege of dying at home. Memory unveiled pictures of the little lad, the first born of the home. Once the boy had disobeyed and received merited punishment and the father had never forgotten the child's frank confession, "Pop, there's something in me that says I'm to be bad and there's another something that tells me to be good. How am I going to make the good one talk loudest?" Was that an early evidence of the weakness of the boy? Had they helped the good to "talk loudest"? How the mother had rejoiced when the first child was a boy and how proudly she had named him Jeremiah! Little pictures of those happy days came back to the old man like flecks of light upon a darkened way—the first school bag with its mysteries of pencils, books and so forth; the first money earned in the store and proudly spent for an aluminum saucepan for mother; the shouts of joy at the first ice skates brought from the store as a reward for faithful shoveling of snow; the first long trousers and the teasing of Mary and Sybilla as the abashed boy blushed and tried to look important; the first days of his absence from the old home while he pursued knowledge in the big city—the stormy scene when the discovery of that dreadful woman blighted the beauty of their serene, harmonious lives. How the gentle mother

had clung to her boy even in the midst of his disgrace, how she trammelled her own hurts in the dust and thought only of him and how to assuage the pain in the hearts of the others who shared the burden of shame! She had tried to soften the father's heart, to make him see that all was not lost, that perhaps, after all, the woman Jerry loved would be so much better than they feared, that she might be redeemed and be worthy of acceptance in the home of the Burkhart family. Had it been a mistake to attempt supervision, control, over the young man? Had they been too quick to condemn? For the first time in the years of estrangement Jeremiah, senior, felt a doubt as to the wisdom of his method of dealing with the boy. Might it be possible that if the boy had had his old home to turn to for refuge in his great sorrow he might have been brought into the fold once more and lived a useful, commendable life among his own people?

Brought face to face with doubt and sensing the truth that he had so long hidden from his own soul the old man, rigorous in his worship and unshakable in his duty as he saw it delineated, suddenly bowed his head and pondered over the years that were gone. That hour he examined his soul, his actions, his words to the erring son, as minutely and unflinchingly as the student with a microscope in search of life-destroying elements. When he raised his face there were new lines graven upon it. After a moment he rose, walked to the stairs and looked up, a purpose deepening in his heart.

The letter in hand, he mounted the steps in his slow way and tapped on Sarah's door.

"Come in," she called.

As the door was opened and her grandfather stood there she gasped. What had happened? He had never

before sought her there. What was in the wind, what meant that new look upon his face?

"Anything wrong?" she asked, noting the letter in his hand.

The man's gaze was fixed on the two pictures on her bureau, the ones she had found that day in the attic and taken without leave.

"Where'd you get them?" he asked.

She faced him with the rigidity of a mother tigress at bay. Her face flamed with the pent-up pain of her heart for her father. "They are mine!" she cried. "I found them on the attic where you had put them when there was no room for them among the rest of the family pictures in the plush album in the parlor. I found them and took them so they might be in the sight of the only person in this world who loves him—my father's daughter! You needn't try to make me hide them, or stop loving him! I'll love my father no matter what he has done. He is my father still, and he loved my lovely Irish mother even if you didn't, and he made her happy and no matter how good you are to me I'd give everything up just to see him happy again."

She ended pantingly, on the verge of tears.

"Sarah ——" The man's voice trembled and it was so unusual that it compelled the attention of the girl.

"What's the matter?" she asked, scenting some alarm in the manner of the old man.

"Read this letter."

He watched her as she read. When the import of the writing reached her she turned and looked at him. "Oh," she cried, "my poor father! Dying—really dying! Never to have that little home we planned to enjoy when he was free! Never to have happiness to make up

for these horrible years! To die without——” The pathos of it overwhelmed her and she flung herself on a chair, hid her head upon her arms and wept.

“Now, now,” she felt the hand of the old man laid upon her hair. “You mustn’t cry that way, Sarah—don’t cry”—emotion caused his own voice to quaver—“don’t cry, now. You and me will go and fetch him home.”

At that she raised her tear-smeared face. There was gladness in her voice despite the sorrow. “You’ll let him come home?”

“It’s where he belongs. I been a hard old man, a hard old man! What you said to me Easter made me think but I wouldn’t do it to listen to you right. Now I wish I had. I guess I never learned what the word forgive means. Mebbe I need to ask your pop what he’s askin’ me in the letter to forgive.”

The girl flung her arms around the neck of the man and their tears mingled. Such demonstrations of feeling were foreign to him but he met them effectually. Some part of his starved, cold heart must have been awakened by the girl’s caress. He held her close to him and whispered, “You’re a blessin’ sent from God.” Then he kissed her.

“Grandpap,” she said tremulously, “if my father weren’t dying I’d be as happy as seven heavens could make me! It’s the first time you ever kissed me and the first time I feel you like me. You *do* like me a little, even if I had an Irish mother?” she asked.

“Sarah, don’t say that! I wish I had known your mom. I’d like to have known the woman that could take my boy from his home and have him be so satisfied with just her that after all he went through since then he can

still say he is glad he married her. I guess she must have been better than I knew. If abody can judge from you any your mom must have been all right."

"Grandpap," smiles and tears mingled in the face of the girl, "I'll love you all the rest of my life for that speech! I'm glad I'm half Irish but I'm proud to-day that the other half of me is Pennsylvania Dutch. That keeps the Irish anchored to the earth and, I hope, furnishes me with a little sense. Then father will be coming home, back to the old home he never forgot or ceased to want—you'll bring him back?"

"We'll fetch him, you and me."

Several days later the Burkhart house in Fairview sheltered another member of the family, the prodigal who had come home to die. The meeting between father and son, who had not met in twenty years, was pathetic. The elder man, thoroughly eager to become reconciled, seeing his former blindness and injustice and repentant concerning them, stood aghast before the son. Emaciated, with the marks of his relentless disease upon him, the younger man rose to meet the father he had so sorely grieved. Like the prodigal of yore he humbled himself but was quickly drawn into the arms of the parent.

Sarah's eyes filled with tears as she saw the reunion of the two men who had come to mean so much in her life. Some intuition of her sex made her see how unhappy the life of the grandfather must have been through the years of estrangement, how deeply the repentance ploughed into his heart. Old Jeremiah did nothing by half measures. He gathered his son to his bosom as a mother might have done.

"Father," she said after the misunderstandings were swept away, "you don't look as sick as I feared you

would. I know after you get home and have that good Pennsylvania Dutch cooking and your own people to care for you you will feel much better!"

The father smiled at the delusion. She would know soon enough, poor child!

It was June when the three returned to Fairview. The old-fashioned roses were blooming by the kitchen door. Sarah brought to the sick man, propped in a chair on the balcony, great armfuls of the pink blossoms. Aunt Mary sat long hours by the side of the returned brother, trying to fill the gap of years, telling him bits of news of old school friends and acquaintances, bringing back to him some of the rosy dreams of his boyhood. Aunt Sybilla seldom sat on the balcony; she was less willing to accept the long estranged brother as one of the family. Of course she knew that it was perfectly right, Christian and only decent, to take him back after he expressed a desire to die in the old home, but she was merely paying him stereotyped kindness. She cooked dishes nourishing and palatable for him—that was her duty, but she did not feign a welcome she did not feel. In the man's hours of utter desolation and crushing unhappiness he never had any consolation from the stern, uncompromising Sybilla. She had not yet learned to include in her vocabulary the magnificent word *forgive*. She accepted his presence as a last addition to the burden he had laid upon them by his wilfulness. Sarah marveled at her. How could the woman remain so steely when the angel of death was hovering over the home? But the girl had ample cause for joy in the miracle she beheld each time she looked into the face of her grandfather. He was no longer stern, cold, critical. The softening influence of the reconciliation with his son changed his very countenance.

Fairview fairly tingled with the new subject for its backyard-conversation-exchange, its parlor confidences and store-news-dispensaries.

Young Jeremiah Burkhart was home to die! The news was sent around in record time. Mrs. Roth ran across the street immediately to offer her help and bring some lamb broth. She was so thankful there was no criminal in her family that she felt like doing some real acts of charity to show her appreciation and gratitude.

The rector came across the hedge one evening and Sarah mentally blessed him for his natural, friendly greeting to her father.

"Father is anxious to meet you, Reverend Snavelly. I have told him all about you."

"All—that's not fair! You should have allowed him to draw his own conclusions instead of telling what a paragon I am."

"There, that sounds Irish!" she exclaimed. "I bet you are part Irish."

They laughed, as people under high tension are glad to laugh at trifles. The rector shook hands with the man and sat down. A soft summer breeze, invigorating and health-renewing, blew across the lawn, but the pallid cheeks of the man, with their hectic daub of crimson, presaged the advent of the Unbidden Guest. The rector's heart swelled with pity at the sight, the face was so strikingly emblematic of the man's life—wasted! That a human life could be so squandered —

Sarah's voice recalled him and the Reverend Snavelly turned to the ex-convict. A new regard for her neighbor sprang to the girl's heart as she saw how friendly and entertaining he could be to the wrecked, wretched man on

the balcony. She did not go beyond that—he was a man one could admire and like.

After the rector left the sick man lay pondering. So Jimmie Snavelly had grown into a fine man like that! A preacher and attractive—what an ideal mate for Sarah. Then he groaned. Would ever a preacher want to marry the daughter of a convict? His heart contracted with a new pain as he realized anew how hardly is it possible for the sower of the whirlwind to reap the whirlwind alone. Others, innocent, must share in the harvest of tears and regrets.

In the days that followed Sarah clung to her father like a shadow. Her grandfather had insisted she leave the work at the store to others and devote her time to the man who was so surely dying. At first she hoped against hope, but gradually she realized that for the man who had paid the penalty of the law for his crime there was being exacted another, greater penalty. Life was slipping away from him like sand through the fingers of a child.

Many afternoons the old man also left the busy store and sat with the little company on the balcony. The girl sensed how strong was the renewed affection between the two men. Over and over she had them tell her about the dear grandmother who had been so like gentle Aunt Mary. Over and over tales of the man's boyhood were told for her enjoyment. And more, the grandfather encouraged the younger man to tell of those wonderful days when the Irish mother of Sarah had brightened his life. When old Jeremiah Burkhart could sit and hear the actress daughter-in-law extolled and shake his head approvingly some radical change had surely been effected in him. A mellow tenderness touched the face of old Jere-

miah those days, as the rugged lines softened under the communion with his son.

The days, for all their lovely June sounds and sights, were chimerical to the people who waited while one of their flock drifted into the valley of the shadow. What hope was in the heart of the man as he neared the dissolution of body and spirit? Once the father asked him whether he would like to see a Mennonite preacher, but the ill man smiled and said no, he was all right. Only the Reverend Snavelly, a frequent visitor to the balcony, could have told what transpired in the heart of the dying man those last days.

The end came in July. The heat of the little town sent the man gasping. He lay inertly on his pillows. Sarah, hovering about him as a mother round a child, caught his whispered desire to have her come closer. She bent over him and he told her, "Sarah, you don't have to be told, but I want to tell you, it doesn't pay to do wrong. What if God forgives, there is still the bitter remorse to drive one almost insane. It bites into me when I think of what might have been—what might have been!"

"But, father, you know, haven't you read, 'Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow'?"

"Yes, yes, I know! But the scarlet remains in your memory. It's hard to forget the wasted years. Sarah, you should be glad for me—I am hoping that death for me means going to her."

In Fairview attendance at funerals is considered a solemn obligation. Neighbors, friends and relatives gather to pay respect to the deceased. The death of a member of the Burkhart family, even the black sheep of the fold, was the signal for black clothes to be brought out and preparations made for a "big funeral." Part of the rite

was the viewing of the body by the public. Many persons, morbidly curious, came to the house on Main Street and passed before the casket where rested the remains of Jeremiah Junior.

"My, ain't he took off a lot!" was the comment of several neighbors. Others saw in the death so much sorrow that they sobbed audibly as they stood in the darkened parlor and looked down at the still face of the man about whom so much gossip had been rampant. There he lay, the man who had broken his mother's heart, caused his father so much shame, darkened the lives of his sisters with the shadows cast by his misdeeds, sent his child into a reformatory—there he lay! What a lesson to heedless youth, the town people said, what an example of a wasted life!

There were some who came to the house of mourning for other purposes. Said one woman frankly, "Of course I'm goin' to that funeral! It wondered me long a'ready how Burkhart's got their house fixed inside and now I got a chance once to get in it, parlor and up-stairs and all."

"Well, I'm not going," said her neighbor. "I don't go to funerals unless they're so near I got to. I think still it's bad enough I got to go to my own."

"Ach," came the startling answer, "I go to every one I can. I think it does abody good to feel sad like at funerals. I don't often miss one."

Sarah, in the house of mourning, heard the tramp of the curious who came to gape at the dead and she resented it. "Even in death they despise him," she thought bitterly. "I know Mrs. Roth is saying she is thankful there never was a criminal in her family!"

But the ordeal of a small-town funeral did not end at

the services in the house. There was the public service in the Mennonite meeting house which was packed to the doors, the harrowing singing of sorrowful hymns, the long sermon, and the march of the people to the front of the church to pass by the casket and take a last look at the remains. Sarah felt that human endurance was taxed to the breaking point by the experience. She came back to the house, limp and exhausted. But even then there was no peace for her. Kindly disposed relatives from out of town, people she had never seen, had come to do their duty and see Jeremiah buried and they lingered for a day or two, turning the funeral occasion into a visit, seizing the unexpected opportunity to make a round of visits among the relatives in and near Fairview.

Finally, when the thing was all over and the house once more quiet, she faced life, changed and sobered by the experience. Her boasted Irish optimism and good cheer seemed held in subjection by sadness. She was thankful to get back to work in the store and try to find partial forgetfulness in occupation.

Aunt Sybilla decided that black garments were the proper thing for the daughter to wear. But Sarah differed.

"I won't wear black for anybody! It's not one bit more respectful than colors and makes me feel more somber. Goodness knows people won't feel happier looking at me in black." Her long acquaintance and close companionship with nature on Sunset Mountain had taught her to view sanely and reverently the mysteries of life and death. To her death was not an event to terrorize the heart into chaotic darkness, neither was it an occasion for incessant wails. She had learned by analogy from nature the glorious truth of resurrection and her

faith upheld her during the dark hours when her sorrow seemed heavier than she could bear.

But there were times when her loneliness, the grief at the death of her father, the pathos of his wasted years, sent her into weeping. Such a time came to her several days after he had been laid to rest in the little cemetery overlooking Fairview. Aunt Sybilla tried to keep the girl occupied in the hope that the depression would wear off. She had sent Sarah to the orchard for cherries. With a tin kettle and a stout hook to fasten it to the branch the girl climbed up into the tree where the luscious cherries were red ripe. She picked them dutifully, their dull thud sounding in the kettle as they fell. A crotch of the tree afforded a safe resting-place and there were so many cherries she could pick a great many without changing position.

Suddenly some vagrant memory of her father's boyhood came to her and the grief she had pent up bravely burst through the flood-gates. She leaned her head against a friendly branch and cried.

"Sarah!" The voice of the rector came to her through the sounds of her own weeping. "What are you doing?"

"I'm picking cherries," she said, her face still hidden.

"You are doing something very different from picking cherries," he insisted. "Come down. Look at me."

She lifted her face to let him see. "There, look!" She tried to smile. "Oh, it's mean in you to make me look at you. Everybody knows that no person is beautiful when they cry. That's why I try to laugh instead, and generally I can manage it but sometimes ——" Her lips trembled.

"Don't you do it!" he said. "Don't do it," he re-

peated tenderly. "Better come down and talk to me," he suggested.

She climbed down, wondering vaguely why she always felt a desire to do as he asked her. "You always come when I cry," she accused him; "have you a barometer to tell you when that happens?"

"Just my—my intuition," he told her.

"Oh!" It was half a query.

"Why were you crying this time?" he asked as they stood together under the tree.

"Oh, I just felt like it! I've got a sloppy heart, always running over. If I'd let it go I'd be crying fifty times a week, but I twist it around and laugh instead, generally. But I had to cry just now. I read once that crying clears the eyes and makes them more glistening." She smiled and he forbore to question her further.

"I came over to tell you good news," he told her.

"What?" She was eager.

"Your class in Sunday school is going to rent a cottage at Mount Gretna in August and spend two weeks there. I am going to take some of the town boys over at the same time to Roths' cottage. I spoke to your grandfather about it and he thinks the change in the mountains would do you good. He is anxious to have you get away for a while. You have certainly won his heart. I told the class I'd speak about it to you for you missed several Sundays and weren't aware of their plans. The girls said they hope you will come with them."

"Um, I'll take that with a grain of salt! Of course they told you they are dying to have me join them but all the time they were praying I sprain my ankle or neck or anything to keep me here! To them I am still that 'heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.' I still have my battle to

fight before I get that immense circle drawn. But if grandpap says I may go I'm going."

"Good! I thought you would not be intimidated by a few snobs who do not understand you. It may be an opportune time to have them become really acquainted with you. The girls are going to love you when they know the real Sarah Burkhart."

She could not speak for a moment, his kindness touched her. "Sometimes," she said after a little silence, "I wish I didn't have quite so much Irish in me, for it makes you so you can be dumped to the pits of purgatory one minute and shot up straight to the heights of heaven the next. It takes my breath away."

"Ah, that isn't being Irish, that's Youth, wonderful, magical Youth, with its recuperative powers and plasticity. Youth, which can be wildly jubilant one minute and dismally unhappy the next. Youth, which can *feel*. Dear girl, only as we carry that youthfulness and capacity to feel into mature years do we live radiant lives. Many of us live sober, fruitful lives, but how few emulate the Pattern and live radiant ones! If I could make people see that, how much a duty joy is, I'd feel that my ministry counted. Be thankful you have that joyfulness in full measure."

"It just comes natural to me to be so," she said, laughing her infectious sparkling ripple.

"Favored of the gods," he suggested.

"Well," she retorted gaily, "don't they owe me something for setting me down in Red Rose Court?" The next instant she was serious. "I have always felt happy inside of me, that is, *off and on*, as they say in Fairview. They work off and on, have headaches off and on, go to church off and on ——"

He laughed. "So you are happy off and on?"

"Yes. I've always been. Even in Red Rose Court I danced and skipped when the hurdy-gurdy played. And when I went to the mountain there was so much to be glad about! New dresses and shoes, after having had to pick them out of the ash boxes and trash cans; a bathtub and lots of hot water all the year round; a real doll the teacher gave me; good meals; molasses for my bread every day; work to do to win the praise of Miss Hughes; the wonderful out-of-doors on a mountain top—I couldn't laugh and skip enough to express all my joy. Then the things Miss Hughes taught me! She'd recite Riley to us until I knew the verses. I can hear her saying now, 'It hain't no use to grumble and complane; it's jest as cheap and easy to rejoice.' And then she'd always add, 'And girls, it's a lot more pleasant for the people who have to be around us.'"

She looked away from him then, deep in retrospect, while he regarded her face, expressive, beautiful in its animation and eagerness. He wondered how he had thought her rather plain when she came to Fairview. Why, with that expression she was magnificent! He ran over her list of things about which she had been grateful—a bathtub, molasses, cheap clothes,—then he remembered pampered children he had met who were never satisfied, to whom expensive toys were merely boredom, spoiled children satiated with life before they tasted it, every desire gratified long before maturity —

"And since I'm here," her voice claimed his attention, "I have so much to make me happier than Stevenson's kings that I ought to be shaken if I ever complain. I'm ashamed of myself when I cry. I must be getting to be a regular old granny, like the woman Aunt Mary tells me

about. She cries at funerals, at christenings, at weddings, entertainments, public celebrations—every place is saturated with her tears. But when you are nice to me I want to cry the worst way. It makes me feel like I did the day I discovered I had a conscience and how it worked. I'll never forget that dreadful hurt in my throat! You make me feel it all over again when you are nice to me." She looked at him as a child might have done, innocent admiration in her eyes.

"Why shouldn't I be nice to you? Aren't we neighbors and haven't you told me many things about Red Rose Court and Sunset Mountain, things which enlightened me! Aren't we friends?"

"I hope so."

"I know so!"

"Then I'll finish picking my cherries since we have settled that!" she said, a bit confused by his direct speaking.

"I'll help you."

In a moment they were up in the same tree picking cherries into the tin pail. Sarah stole glances at him from time to time. How different he seemed from the man who read the prayers in St. Paul's or walked solemnly into the chapel in his long black gown! And yet how like him! She felt very glad to know he was her friend.

CHAPTER XIV.

MOUNT GREтна

IN the beautiful South Mountains of Pennsylvania lies the famous summer resort, Mount Gretna. Several hundred cottages, ranging from those of simplest structure to picturesque bungalows, are scattered under the towering trees of the mountains. Vacationists find Mount Gretna an ideal spot of sylvan rest, energetic colonists delight in the mountain climbing and bathing in beautiful Lake Conewago which lies in the arm of the towering Governor Dick Mountain. A tract of many acres is owned by the government and used for national encampment purposes, which adds to the life and gaiety of the place.

The summer arrivals had come in great numbers that August when Sarah and the other members of her class, chaperoned by Mrs. Roth, arrived in Mount Gretna. Sarah knew that she was the one unwelcome person in the party but some power seemed to tug at her and force her to come. The girls, still unacquainted with the new member, were cool in their manner, but she steeled her heart and allowed the snubs to glance from her like arrows from armor. The girls soon found that Sarah was immune to snubs, entered heartily into every sport, did her share of the work in the cottage, and after the manner of youth, they forgot some of their prejudice and treated her more kindly.

Mrs. Roth considered it a great charity to chaperone a crowd of which Sarah made one. She still thanked

heaven devoutly that her family escutcheon was unstained. Of necessity she swallowed her unfriendliness as well as she could and assumed a self-righteous air. She would try to improve the daughter of Jeremiah Burkhart, while she vowed extreme vigilance that the reformatory girl could not exert any evil influence upon the dear girls who had been reared so carefully. Poor martyred Mrs. Roth anticipated a trying time at the mountain resort.

Fortunately Sarah gained some slight prestige because of her ability to cook. Most of the girls were accustomed to help with the housework. One or two frankly stated they knew nothing about cooking and managed to shift their burdens upon other shoulders. Sarah's were the shoulders upon which most of the shifting was done.

"You're such a dear," they told her, "you don't mind sweeping the porch while I run down for the mail. I know mother will send me a note to-day."

"Certainly I'm a dear, I don't mind," would be Sarah's answer and her winsome smile disarmed suspicion. Behind their backs she twisted her face into a grimace and whispered, "I'm dead easy now, but I have an axe to grind. Sarah isn't as stupid as she looks."

But, though burdened with more than her share of the tasks about the cottage, she found time to run to the lake in her bathing suit and swim about with the others. It was her first trial in the water, really her first vacation! To the other girls the days at Mount Gretna were a mere lark and good time, to Sarah they were an event.

Several mornings after arrival in the woods she was sweeping the porch. She had risen early; the clambering of chipmunks and squirrels upon the roof of the cottage had wakened her before daylight. She had set the

cottage in order, then went out to the porch and stood drinking in the fresh ozone of the mountains. The beauty of the morning thrilled her. Birds were caroling in the great trees that canopied the entire colony of cottages. A shower during the night had drenched the leaves with fragrance and the pines exuded their wholesome odor. Jays screamed in strident voices but even their discordant sounds seemed so much a part of the woods that Sarah loved them, quarrelsome blue trouble-makers though they were.

"Race you sweeping the porch!" challenged a voice.

She looked down the woodland street and there, several doors below by a rambling cottage, stood the Reverend James Snavelly, broom in hand.

"Why," she said as he came to meet her, "when did you come? Mrs. Roth thought you'd be here to-day."

"We came in late last night. Had a chance to come up in a car and the boys were anxious to get here so we came. There are four of us, Dan Roth, two others and myself."

"Going to do your own cooking?"

"Yes, for a time. The boys think it will be a lark but we'll probably end by doing as the old Indian said, 'I cook myself, I eat myself.'"

Sarah laughed. "If it gets too bad drop in here for a meal. Mrs. Roth won't mind so long as her darling boy is in the crowd."

"Thank you. We may have to take advantage of your offer. But we'll try cooking for a few days until the boys tire of it. One of them says he knows how to cook and we are going to make him prove it."

The arrival of the rector and the boys from Fairview added great interest to the stay at Mount Gretna, thought

the other girls under Mrs. Roth's chaperonage. Of course the rector, they reasoned, was too old to be considered a real companion. His thirty-odd years seemed well-nigh ancient compared to their eighteen. But Dan and the younger boys were lively and jolly and a good time was anticipated.

Dan sought out Sarah the very first day. The smiles of the other girls were passed with mere recognition and Sarah singled from the crowd to receive the signal favor of his attentions, greatly to the dismay of his mother. Later, when she could manage a private talk with her son she called him to sharp account. "Dan," she tried to be diplomatic, "I can't have any of you boys paying special attention to any one girl."

"Darn it, mother," he retorted, "if I singled out the right one, Mary Becker for instance, you'd never say a word. I tell you Sarah has the others skinned a mile! She's a peach!"

"But not for you to pick! Remember that! She isn't your stripe of a girl. I'd never call her my daughter. She has a past that can't be lived down. Thank heaven ——"

"Oh, mother, cut the dramatics!" he said flippantly. "Quit thanking heaven in public; it isn't done these days, you know! I'm going to have a bad case on Sarah so you might as well make the best of it. Suppose I'll get over it as I got over the measles without any after-effects. Darn her, though, she's as high strung as a real aristocrat; wonder who she thinks she is!"

However, Sarah, greatly to Dan's surprise, received his attentions more calmly than she had done in the little town. She walked with Dan, went swimming with him, attended the movies with him, occasionally danced with

him—shades of her Mennonite ancestors!—but she held him just where she wanted him. As soon as he waxed sentimental she grew irresponsive and he soon divined that the only way to gain any attention from her was to be friendly but nothing more.

As the rector watched the coupling of the two his heart was troubled. Something akin to dismay came to him. What did a boy like Dan want with a girl like Sarah? Why, she was fathoms too deep for the shallow youth! Too fine, lovely—could it be that ulterior motives prompted the girl? Then he put such visionary surmises down as unfair to her. She was probably amusing herself, after the manner of thoughtless youth. He tried to view matters from that angle and called himself a meddling, jealous creature when he felt little pangs as he saw Dan and Sarah strolling off to the lake or bound for maidenhair ferns or wild flowers. What did it matter to him? Why was he so concerned about it? Of course he had found the little neighbor intensely interesting and different from the general run of girls or women he knew, but he never analyzed his feelings more minutely than that. Then once in the quiet of the woods as he stretched prone under a pine tree where the brown needles made a cushion fragrant and inviting, he studied over the matter. What was his feeling for the girl next door? The laughing, crying child-woman whose heart was so big and full of sympathy that it constantly had an overflow. Sarah, from whose childish lips had fallen oaths and rude speech that no other girl in Fairview had ever heard; Sarah, whose father had narrowly escaped death in a prison cell; Sarah, against whose record was chalked, marked with indelible strokes, SIX YEARS IN A REFORMATORY—what a girl she was! How keen an in-

sight she had! He remembered how he had winced under her searching gaze and the declaration that he, too, thought her a "heretic, rebel, a thing to flout," certainly not a thing to love. She was right; he had thought her as one needing help, aye, reformation. He had seen in her an errant child unfortunate in so many ways, the victim of environment, and he had offered her church and Sunday school as a solution of her troubles when what she had craved most was companionship. He had prayed for her soul when a walk through the country lanes and a friendly talk on life, nature, and the like, would have helped her infinitely more. What did her influence mean to him? What was the import of the power she was certainly exerting upon him, unconsciously to herself, he was certain. Was he beginning to care for her as he had never cared for any woman before? Hitherto he had seen many women he admired but none to whom he could give his love. None of them had ever been able to grip his heart strings and play the music there that Sarah's presence could. What was he thinking of? Certainly he, a clergyman, could not consider marriage with a reformatory girl! It was out of the question! Yet he despised himself for the thought. Sane, deliberate thinking showed him clearly that if he ever married it would have to be a girl of impeccable character, whose past would admit a searchlight of investigation. The wife of a clergyman could not hope to escape microscopic dissections of her past, so much he knew of the ways of the world. And yet, even as he convinced his heart that his reasoning was correct, there came to him the strong, irresistible truth that the child of Red Rose Court had come unscathed through experiences that would have submerged and contaminated a weaker nature. He had

to admit that each new experience to the Irish-Dutch neighbor had but enriched and broadened her vision, expanded her capacity to feel. Never would a creature in need appeal to her in vain. The whimpering of the children of pestilential Red Rose Court would echo in the cry of every other child she ever heard; the remembrance of the shadows sin had cast into her life would set her heart throbbing with sympathy for all degraded, unhappy mortals. Her sorrows had, indeed, brought her an "eagle-sight of God."

The rector recognized the truth but the world-old demarcations between man-made standards of right and wrong seemed ineradicable. In the eyes of the world Sarah Burkhart was not suitable for the wife of any minister of the Gospel. And in the heart of the Reverend James Snavelly raged the ancient battle between duty and desire.

The cooking experiment in the bachelor cottage soon ran the experimenters into deep water. The girls shrieked with laughter one of the first days when the boys recounted their experiences in the kitchen. They were all sitting on the porch of the girls' house, Mrs. Roth very much in evidence as befitted a faithful watcher.

"Say," began the narrator of the tale, "this was rice day at our house."

"Rice day! What's that?" came the query he hoped for.

"I'll tell you! It was my turn to cook. I thought I'd give them a treat for dessert, not pie from the boarding-house—any simp can do that! I'd cook some rice and serve it with milk, sugar and bananas. So I asked all the fellows and they voted for it. Well, I counted four of us and doubled that for second helpings and a few more

in case any asked for third, then I measured out ten saucers of rice, heaping full, no skimping when I cook! I put it on to boil. Bless me, in a little while it was going over the stove, put the fire out! I put half in another kettle and lighted another burner and started them off. I watched them and right then died the old saying that a watched pot never boils. They boiled and boiled and came near spilling rice over the stove again. So I had to find a third pot and divide the contents of the two, and when the operation was completed we had three huge mounds of rice. It'll be rice for breakfast, dinner and supper for a week. How was I to know the thing swells like a sponge in water!"

The girls laughed at the story and promptly called the boy Ricey. So sped the days in the mountains, care-free, filled with walks and swims or idle resting under the trees. To Sarah they were one long holiday. The charm of her personality gradually attracted the girls. Her sense of humor, quick repartee, big-hearted kindness, won for her first admiration, then real affection. With the frankness of youth the girls refused to accept the opinions of Mrs. Roth and the town in general and took into their hearts the child of a convict. "I don't care," they told each other confidentially, "she's lots of fun and I like her!"

Sarah felt the breaking of the barrier between them and was glad. She began to see the first swath of that circle she had planned to draw.

Every day was a joy day. There were walks to the lake, down a long winding path through the heart of the dense woods that edges Lake Conewago. Sometimes there were longer climbs to the several peaks from whose summits a panoramic view of the country could be had.

It was to one of these peaks that Sarah and Dan came several days before the end of the two weeks' stay at Mount Gretna.

Another girl and boy had started with them for the place where maidenhair ferns grow, but before they reached the last trail the others decided to change their destination and seek high moss that grew along a stream and, they agreed, when the two parties returned to the cottage the spoils could be divided. Sarah demurred but the girl laughed and said, "Oh, what's going to bite you? Are you afraid of Dan?"

Thus cornered Sarah could do no less than agree to the changed plan and she and Dan continued on their way to the rare maidenhair while the others turned aside to a lower trail.

It was a perfect day in the woods. The grand old trees reared their tops so high and were growing so close together that when Sarah looked upward her eyes met only a tangle of green boughs—oak, maple, pine, interlaced until it was difficult to distinguish the parent trunk of each tree. Hardy sword ferns grew in profusion, blackberry vines and elders, laurel bushes and Solomon's seal made a thick carpet under the trees. Along a sloping bank away from the narrow trail tramped for years through the woods, the dainty maidenhair fern lifted its delicate parasols of green.

Sarah exclaimed joyously when she spied the first one. She ran to it, knelt in the moss and touched the fronds gently. "Oh," she cried, "these make me feel homesick for Sunset Mountain! We used to get them there, plant them in moss and keep them all winter. That was a paradise for birds, flowers and so forth."

"But not for people," said the boy unsympathetically.

"I should think you'd want to forget that place instead of talking about it all the time."

"Why?" she challenged, looking up at him with a frown on her face that had so lately been radiant.

"Oh, well, you know a reformatory isn't exactly a place to boast of as a former residence," he said jauntily, smiling.

"No—I suppose you are like your mother—you thank heaven there was never a criminal or reformatory inmate in your family!"

The sarcasm did not escape the young man but he threw back his head and laughed loudly. "Really, girly," he said gaily, "you are almost handsome when you're angry."

Sarah's eyes grew dark. She ignored the bold speech and bent more closely over the ferns.

Dan did not change the subject so readily. He turned to where the girl knelt among the ferns and smiled down at her. "Dearie, you're some girl! I told mother you have the others skinned a mile."

Sarah rose from the damp earth and faced him, her face scarlet with wrath, her lips tense. "You better be careful how you speak to me, Dan Roth!" she warned him. But he was deaf to her words. The next instant he grabbed her and though she struggled, succeeded in printing a kiss upon her face. With a mighty wrench she loosened his hold, gave him a hard smack on the mouth, and darted down the woods away from him.

"Sarah!" the boy called after her; the unexpected chastisement nonplussed him.

"Sarah!" He looked about in bewilderment—had the earth opened and swallowed her? She was nimble and the dense growth of bushes aided her. In a short time

she was completely out of sight of the youth, who stood among the ferns, occasionally rubbing a hand ruefully across his smarting face.

"By George! The little fool! She can't find her way back to the cottage if she goes in that direction. Sarah!" But the woods gave back the empty sound, "ah!" He called again; the "ah" fell mockingly upon his ears. "Sarah!" He started in pursuit. "Come back! I won't touch you again. You'll never find the way back alone!"

If the girl heard his frantic appeals she gave no sign. She had struck headlong into the woods and kept going circuitously—anywhere to get away from the man who had managed to instil genuine fear into her heart.

Dan floundered about in the dense undergrowth, calling vainly but finding no trace of the girl's path. If he had been endowed with Indian shrewdness and ability to read the trail by trampled weeds left in her wake following her might have been comparatively easy, but he was an ordinary youth with little knowledge of woodcraft and in his shock and apprehension he had stood helplessly by while she ran far enough from him to be completely concealed by the dense growth and after his scattered wits were collected he had no means of determining the direction of her flight. After an hour's vain search along the narrow trail he confessed himself at a loss to find her and started on the homeward road alone.

"Confound her!" he muttered, "there'll be a grand fuss if I get in ahead of her or she doesn't turn up soon! Perhaps she's there now and will have the laugh on me for hunting her when she's safe at the cottage."

But when Dan came to the girls' cottage he found assembled on the porch all except Sarah.

"Why, where's Sarah?" called the girl who had started with them on the walk. "Have you lost her or thrown her down a gulley?"

"I—she left me and started back alone." He was thoroughly confused.

"What!" shouted several of the girls. "You let her go off alone in those mountains! Are you crazy, Dan Roth?"

His mother came to his rescue. "Oh, she'll get back all right! It simply goes to show what a wild creature she is. The idea of her running away from Dan and placing him in such a predicament! But what else can one expect from such a girl? Serves her right if she gets a good scare. But she can easily find the path and keep on it till she strikes the railroad, then she'll know where she is. There is no need to worry. She will be back soon enough."

"Yes," said Mary Becker who had tramped over those mountains and knew their vastness, "that would be very easy if there were only one trail, but I happen to know there are dozens of wood-cutters' trails leading deep into the woods, miles from here, some of them. To be lost in the heart of that hill is no joke. It's a shame! What kind of an escort are you, Dan Roth, to allow a girl to do such a thing!"

"Ah, she didn't ask me, just got funny and ran off and before I knew what she was up to she was gone so I couldn't find her. She was lost as a needle in a haystack."

"Um," the girl eyed him keenly. "What made her do that?" she demanded. "She would not have done it unless she had some good reason."

"Bah!" Dan turned from his inquisitor. "She makes

me sick! Let her be lost! What is she at any rate—just a convict's kid and a reformatory girl!"

"Oh, no, you aren't fair to her!" said Sarah's champion. "Sarah is more than you said just now! She is the cleverest, kindest, most original and entertaining girl I know! We have been mean to her, so mean we couldn't see her fine qualities. I guess we were prejudiced by gossip, most of us. But if she ever comes back I'm going to try to win her friendship; she's worth cultivating. I have an idea we could all learn a few things from Sarah Burkhart."

The praise, coming from one of Fairview's socially elect, augured well for the future happiness of Sarah. But the praise struck terror to the heart of Mrs. Roth. The words, "if she ever comes back," set her thinking.

"My gracious," she cried, "the girl might really get lost! What shall we do?" She lifted her eyes to the big mountain that reared its head above Mount Gretna and trailed away into dimness remote. To be lost there was, indeed, no joking matter.

"Dan," she cried, "whatever made you let her do such a thing? We must find her! I'll tell the rector and you have to start after her."

"Go ahead," said the boy stubbornly. "I'm not in it! I called her and she wouldn't come back."

His mother did not answer but ran down to the cottage where the rector was. Her story was soon told. The look on the face of the Reverend Snavelly did not tend to reassure her. The man sensed something more than mere caprice in the flight of the girl. What had Dan done? But there was scanty time for ruminating. It was already late in the afternoon. In several hours at most dusk would envelop the mountains. The rector

moved quickly. In a short time he had gathered the boys, Dan making an unwilling member of the searching party, though he could not meet the inquiring eyes of the rector.

"Ah," he grumbled, "all this fuss and while we're off she'll come strolling to the cottage and laugh at us for a pack of fools."

"Would you like to spend the night alone in the hills?" asked the man so quietly that Dan flushed and said, "Come on, I'm ready."

Prepared with lanterns and flash-lights the rescue party started off. Doubtless many of the cottagers wondered at the strange procession but they were not enlightened. Mrs. Roth persuaded the rector to keep the matter quiet unless it became imperative to call upon others for assistance. The little party crossed the picnic grounds, the railroad, then struck into the woods. Up, up led the trail to the lair of the maidenhair ferns, through aisles of sylvan beauty. Great monarchs of the mountains towered over them, the green of August springing luxuriantly covered every corner with loveliness. But they had no eyes for the beauties of the woods then. Even Dan began to feel the loneliness and utter isolation of the woodland depths.

When they reached the place where two trails branched away from the main one they had followed the rector decided to split the party.

"It would be best to go several ways. Two of you follow the one to the right and one take the left-hand road for that leads to the lake after a long winding and won't be so lonely for one to go alone. I'll follow this main trail to the maidenhair place."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"No. I have a gun in my pocket. In case you find her hello. But if I find some trace of her and think I'm on the right track I'll keep on till dark overtakes me. If I find her I'll fire the gun. I really think, though, there's more chance of your finding her on the lower trails as she'd naturally go down hill if she became lost. I know the lay of the land fairly well up there for I've tramped all over it. I'm hoping some of us will find her before dusk. Of course there is little danger from any wild beasts, but it's creepy to be lost in the woods at night. Well, boys, go on till you think dusk is coming then get back to the cottage. Good luck!"

So the boys followed the directions of the rector while he plodded up the steep path to the place where the ferns grew. He paused there a time, noted the trampled ferns and broken branches of interfering shrubbery. A huckleberry plant flat upon the ground pointed to the direction the girl had taken from the fern bower. But the trail was hard to follow. It led straight through the densest portions of the woods, down hill over a sloping portion whose precipitous descent had helped the girl in concealment.

"That boy scared her!" the rector exclaimed. "I'd like to know what sort of a fool he made of himself!"

It was, indeed, like the renowned search for a needle in a haystack. Once he found the imprint of a woman's shoe in the soft mold. He hailed it with delight. For a stretch he was able to follow her trail by the footprints planted into the dark earth. It was drawing him deeper into the woods. He wished he had brought the others up there and then sent them into other directions, for he was almost certain she had gone into the woods far away from the trails he had sent them to follow. Yet, who

knew where her wanderings would lead her! According to the evidence before the rector she was traveling farther away from Mount Gretna every step. Once he spied something white and stooped to pick it up. It was a handkerchief with an embroidered S in one corner. He tucked it into his pocket and kept on, confident he was on the right trail. Yet the others might reach her rather than he for he knew how many were the curves of the trails. If by any chance she had turned and gone down hill the boys might have found her but if she kept on as she seemed to have done he would be nearest to her. Frequently he called loudly, but no response greeted him. Dusk began to settle in the woods and still he kept on going. He felt sure he was on the proper trail, though his frequent hellos met with only the mournful echo of the woods.

"Sarah!" he called, but the forest swallowed her name.

He kept on, his lantern lighted and swung low to search for traces of her going. He found them at intervals, prints of her shoes in the loam of the woods, and he blessed the spongy nature of the soil. Broken, trampled plants greeted him at other places and he clung to the hope that they had been trampled by Sarah, not by any woodland creature. Then darkness came and with it an uneasy feeling that perhaps he had missed the trail after all. He could see no more prints in the ground; it suddenly became covered thickly with leaves and low shrubbery. He confessed himself entirely uncertain as how to go. But he felt he could not go back. He had followed her so far and going back would mean losing the scent. He resolved to spend the night in the woods and wait for daybreak to continue the search. In the light he stood more chance to discover new clews. So the rector se-

lected a sheltered place under a tree, broke off branches of pine and made a bed, then stretched out in the green nest, pulled other branches over him. The night had brought chilliness on the hills and a blanket would not have been amiss. The man closed his eyes but not to sleep. A thousand worries plagued him like devils—how was the girl faring, what shelter had she from the cold? Had the others found her? Was she scared or hurt or still tramping hopelessly farther into the maze of trees?

Once he stopped short to ask his heart why the plight of the girl was so much concern to him. Was it mere humanitarianism for a friend in distress, was it wholly pity and a desire to rescue from discomfort that urged him to spend the night in the open and then go on until he should find the lost girl? But the riddle of his heart received no solution that night. When the first streaks of dawn invested the trees with a gray ghostliness he jumped from his bed, shook the pine needles from his clothes, and started off for new clues to lead him to the girl.

CHAPTER XV

THE LOST COTTAGE

WHEN Sarah ran from the kiss of Dan Roth she seemed impelled by a force over which she had no control. Anywhere to get away from that look in his eyes and the hot sacrilege of his touch on her lips! She struck into the wildest part of the woods expecting that he would see and follow her and subject her to further humiliation. She glanced back in terror and was amazed to find that the kindly bushes had hidden her. She could not see Dan and reasoned that he therefore could not see her. Then she crept cautiously on her hands and knees farther away from him, hiding behind giant trunks, curving her direction a trifle so that she kept behind the place where they had come for ferns. She heard him calling and moved from the sound of his voice. Fainter and fainter grew his calls and she thanked heaven that he had taken the wrong direction. But she still kept on, low on the ground, which accounted for the trampled bushes which had helped the rector. After what seemed ages to her she raised herself and stood still. All was quiet about her. She was in the heart of a thick woods, no trail or path in sight, only an unbroken forest that stood majestically all around her.

"Oh," she breathed, "what a place! But how am I going to get out of it?"

In her terror she had taken no account of the turns and twists she had made, following only the least tangled

course through the woods, and making numerous turns that completely shut her from any knowledge of the direction in which Mount Gretna and its haven cottage lay. She went on until she thought it must be just ahead, but no path came in sight. It was dusk, she was tired and hungry—and lost! The consciousness of the fact pierced her mind. Lost—she repeated the word. Her face blanched for an instant—lost in the mountains—the words were pregnant with terror and nameless fear. She was afraid to call for Dan. Perhaps he was still lurking about, perhaps other fugitives were in those hills—what could she do! She stood still and pondered, a feeling of helplessness possessing her. As she stood so a small rabbit bounded out of the bushes close to her. He froze at sight of her, then turned and hopped into the woods again, his white cottontail bobbing like a ball.

Sarah laughed. "There," she said to herself, "if a tiny bunny isn't afraid in these woods I shouldn't be! I guess there are no wolves or lions or their like here to eat me up. It's getting dark and I can't think of anything better to do than wait until the lights are out and then climb a tree and look for Mount Gretna. If I were a girl scout or an Indian I'd know how to get out of this, I suppose. But I don't seem able to remember anything I learned about the woods from Miss Hughes except that the moss grows on the north side of the trees. But heaven only knows whether Mount Gretna is north or some other direction from here. I'm the dumbest thing when it comes to direction. I lose myself as easily as a baby. But I'm not lost. I'm like the Indian who was lost but said, 'Indian not lost, wigwam lost!' I'm not lost, Mount Gretna's lost! Poor Mount Gretna, it's too lovely a place to be lost!" She smiled. "But I'll

find it in the morning." So, with the indomitable will of her ancestors, a strong strain both paternally and maternally, she decided to make the best of the situation and refrain from hysteria. "I'm lost—no, I mean Mount Gretna's lost—and I can't find it right away so I'll have to stay where I am. I'm afraid to sleep on the ground." The old saying of her childhood came to her—"I ain't afraid of nobody nor nothin' but snakes!" It still held good. She feared crawly things as much as in those early days. "I'll have to look around for a tree I can climb and roost there, then I guess I'll be a rooster." She laughed at her feeble wit, making the experience as much of a lark as she could.

The place where she halted was closely set with oaks looming dark in the swift-gathering night. About the trunk of one was twined a wild grape-vine that reached high into the branches and had sent out tendrils, across to other trees, forming a natural swing of green. Sarah tried the swing; it bore her weight without sagging greatly. She gripped it firmly and was soon in the lowest branch of the oak, with the vine of the grape forming a green back for her comfort.

"There," she said as she settled herself in a crotch, trying to find the softest spot in the tree and pulling some of the luxuriant vines for a cushion, then twining some about her neck and shoulders to keep out the cold wind that rustled through the woods. Once a pair of black eyes regarded her curiously and a striped chipmunk looked out from behind the shelter of a neighboring tree as though to ask the reason of such intrusion in his grape haunt. But Sarah laughed at him and pulled some of the wild grapes from the vine and ate them.

"I'm hungry! I've been so flabbergasted I forgot

about it, but I am hungry! If I can't find the way out in the morning I'll have to be like Elijah. But I could eat grapes. I wouldn't starve. There are grapes—and grapes—and—I guess I would grow tired of a diet of just grapes!"

The sleepy cheep of birds was all she heard in the tree. By and by that, too, was hushed and silence reigned in the forest. When the stars came out she climbed farther up; perhaps she could see lights and find her bearings. But though she mounted branch after branch she could not reach the top of the oak by many feet and all she could discern was more trees and more trees until her heart sank.

"I'll climb back nearer the ground for there I feel less keenly that I am lost. Up here"—her lips trembled—"I'll just have to stay here all night. Perhaps I'm a short distance from the cottage, perhaps miles."

She crept back to her grape-vine once more—so soon it had become a blessed refuge. There she settled as comfortably as possible in the broad crotch and waited for dawn. She was afraid to sleep; her hold on the tree was none too solid. With sleep might come a tumble into the grass and perhaps upon a sleeping snake. The very thought sent shivers up and down her back. So she sat all night wide awake, nodding at times, drawing her thin dress closely about her and wishing for some magic power to transform the grape leaves into blankets. She was tired and hungry and cold and unhappy and all because she had run away from Dan Roth in a moment of wild fright. Dan Roth was the fault of her predicament—Dan, the son of the woman who thanked God her family had no black sheep! Sarah's attitude toward that family was none too pleasant during that night. If Dan

had been within reach of her he would have undoubtedly suffered more than a slap upon the mouth. But Dan was safe in his cottage while she clung to the wild grape-vine in an oak tree.

At times the funny side of the situation demanded her attention and she laughed. "I'm up a tree, for sure," she thought. But the next minute she would shiver and tremble and wish all sorts of bad luck upon the one who was responsible for her discomfort.

"And yet," she confessed, "I guess I'm getting just what I deserve. I just ran around with Dan and was nice to him because his mother hates me so. Serves me right, what I got!"

Never was the dawn welcomed so cordially by Sarah as that morning. The light came slowly into the fastness of the forest, but it came none the less surely. First a dull gray crept into the woods, then the light filtered through the canopy of leaves and Sarah could see the dim outlines of the bushes under the trees. With the first glimmer of light the birds began their morning songs. To Sarah, who found delight in the feathered friends, the chorus was a joy long to be remembered, even above the terror and discomfort of the night. A whistling cat-bird started the song and was quickly followed by a medley of other bird-voices that roused the curiosity of the listener in the tree.

"What bird is that? Oh, that's a new song!" fell from the lips of the girl. "Glory, how sweet!"

Dawn in the forest was delightful, she thought, and almost made up for the night spent in the crotch of an oak. Warblers and vireos poured forth their limpid notes of joy, thrushes added their sweetness to the music, a screaming jay forever picking a quarrel sounded the only

discordant note in the chorus. He flew close to Sarah's tree and flashed his blue gorgeousness about with seeming unconcern of her presence.

Underfoot the earth seemed to waken too with the light. Squirrels scampered across the weeds, a big brown butterfly rose from a flower where he had doubtless spent the night, a few vagrant bees started off on their round of daily toil. Sarah climbed from the tree and looked about her. Which way to go to reach the cottage?

She picked a handful of wild grapes and ate them, thinking how monotonous grape diet would become if indefinitely resorted to. In spite of her uncomfortable position in the tree she felt ready to tramp anew; her heart beat with fresh courage. Dawn brought to her some of its magic, invigorating power. Of course she could not be many miles from Mount Gretna! The mountain was not so huge that she could not find an outlet soon!

"I'll just keep on going and trust to luck," she thought as she stood ready to resume her search for the homeward trail. She reasoned that if the road she had taken the previous night had been the right one she would have reached familiar places, so she might as well start out in a different direction. She had passed the mammoth oak the previous night—now which way? Then she remembered one of the tricks of Red Rose Court used by the urchins to find lost marbles and so forth—she solemnly opened her left hand and spat into it, then clapped into it the forefinger of the right hand. It was an unfailing guide, she had thought in those Red Rose Court days, and now, though grown above superstition, she resorted to the old method and gravely set out in the direction indicated by the test.

It was still early morn, the daylight not yet full, but so eager was she to find the way back that she set out gladly in the dimness. What had they thought at the cottage? Had they feared for her? But, pshaw! There were none to actually worry about her. None in that little group cared whether she were lost or not. They might feel curious about her, worried for what the world would say if any harm befell her while with them, but real worry for her own sake—that was out of the question! Sarah laughed to keep from crying as she went along.

“Why did this have to happen?” she asked herself. “Just when Mary Becker and some of the girls were beginning to act as though they liked me I had to go spoil the whole thing. Of course they are so proper they are shocked terribly at a girl who runs from a boy and gets lost and spends the night alone in the woods! I am marking up a list of black crosses after my name!”

Then she thought of Dan. What had he told them? Had he invented some ingenious tale? Oh, Dan would look out for Dan every time! She had no fear that he would tell the reason of her flight.

As she tramped through the underbrush, her eyes keen for snakes in the tangled weeds, a faint “Hello!” came to her. Her heart seemed to suspend action for a moment, a panic of fear seized her. She crouched in the grass behind a clump of laurel whose glossy leaves hid her effectually. All thought of snakes left her; a lurking copperhead might have struck its fangs deeply in a death blow as she knelt there, her ears strained for the sound of that voice.

“Hello!” It came nearer. Was that Dan’s voice?

“Hello! Sarah!” The voice was not Dan’s! A re-

laxation stole over the girl as she caught through the bushes a glimpse of the rector. She rose and answered, then stood by the laurel and swayed unsteadily.

"Oh, I'm so glad it's you!" she said as he ran down the woodland aisle to her.

"Are you all right?" His words came in breathless anxiety.

She nodded her head; words seemed to be difficult to utter.

"Perfectly all right?" he insisted.

Quickly she regained her composure. "'I'm clothed and in my right mind,'" she quoted.

The man laughed in relief. The search was ended, he had found Sarah! "How, why did it happen?" he asked as they started off through the woods.

"Am I far from Mount Gretna?" she evaded.

"Just about two miles and in the heart of the woods. How did it happen?"

"Didn't Dan tell you—what did Dan tell you?"

"He said you ran away from him and got lost."

"Well, I guess Dan knows as well as I do, so why ask me the same thing?" she answered, which was, he felt, a polite way to tell him that further probing would be useless.

"So long as you're all right ——" the man began, then he looked away quickly. He was struggling hard not to be drawn into that circle she and Love were drawing! "Where did you spend the night?" he asked. "At the birds' inn?"

"No, the chipmunks'," she replied. Then she told him of her supper of wild grapes and breakfast of wild grapes, her rest in the tree, and she launched into a description of the early chorus of the birds until the man

felt relieved in knowing that the experience had not been so harrowing for her as one might imagine.

"If some one had been with me it would have been the greatest treat of my life!" she ended. "To hear the birds usher in the dawn in the forest is wonderful. To be out under the stars all night is delightful!"

"Yes. I have enjoyed those things. I slept many nights under the open sky one summer in Colorado. It's great—great! You'd enjoy the mountains of the west where we carry blankets and food and climb miles and miles to the summit and see the sunset, then roll up in the blanket and sleep under the stars until sunrise."

"Oh, I should enjoy that! I hope I'll get to see it some day."

They went on silently a while then began to talk; she thanking him for the rescue, he trying to make light of it, and both at length turning to nature's boundless, interesting subjects for relief from the strange embarrassment that had foolishly touched them.

"I saw a tree up there blown by the storm," she told him. "A big, green tree with thick trunk like the other trees but when it was wrecked you could see that where its heart should have been there was nothing but a big vacant hollow."

"Yes ——" he drew the word out in that drawling, inquiring way he had. Sarah flushed. What had made her say that? As if she were trying to imply that he had no heart—oh, life was a complicated thing!

She was glad when they reached a little mountain brook and her perplexities of mind could be forgotten while they talked of the clear waters and the sands showing through the transparency.

Sarah sank to her knees, dipped her hand in the cold



"I WON'T PRESS MINE," SHE SAID GAILY

water and drank from her cupped palm. He stood by regarding the picture. Like a Narcissus bending over the stream, he likened her.

"Oh," she startled him with her cry, "look!" She pointed down stream to where a few sprigs of flaming cardinal flowers stood like soldiers among the reeds and grasses. Darting through the weeds she plucked two branches of the rare crimson blossoms. "One for each of us," she said, smiling, as she handed it to him. "This says, 'Thank you, Reverend Snavelly, for what you did for me.'"

"Thank *you!*" He drew from his pocket a small note-book and laid the scarlet flowers between the pages as if to press them.

"I won't press mine," she said gaily. Then she tucked the red flowers in her hair where they made a vivid streak of color against the black of her locks.

All the rest of the way to the old trail the girl was laughing and merry. It seemed to the man beside her that some brightness of the very morning itself had been caught by her and rang out in her infectious laugh. She sobered as they entered the grounds where the cottages stood.

"I forget," she confessed, "that not everybody in this place has been out all night! It behooves me to be sober and dignified. I dare say I should assume a doleful expression and look at you with that 'Fond-hero-you saved-my-life' expression!"

She checked her tongue as they passed a cottage where an early riser was sweeping the porch. Doubtless the two young people were thought of as lovers strolling out to escape the maddening crowd. A warm smile followed them as they passed.

Mary Becker, the girl who had championed Sarah the previous day, was sweeping the porch when Sarah and the rector came in sight. As Sarah called, "Oo-oo!" Mary turned. The next moment her broom was thrown aside and her arms twined about the neck of the lost girl.

"Sarah, I'm glad to see you safely back! We thought you were lost!"

"Why ——" the demonstration was surprising to the girl who had received so little in that line during her eighteen years. "I was lost but Reverend Snively found me."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Tears sprang to the eyes of the girl.

"Why ——" Sarah looked at her, amazed. "I never thought any one would care if I were lost, not really *care*."

"But I do. I care very much, Sarah. You're the dearest girl I know and I don't want to lose you just when I come to my senses enough to appreciate you."

"Why, Mary Becker, it's worth living in the woods, lost, a whole week to hear you say that! I'd live on wild grapes for more than one day to hear you tell me that I really have a friend."

"Listen to her," said Mary to the rector; "wouldn't you know she's part Irish by the blarney of her?" She linked her arm affectionately in Sarah's. "Mrs. Roth will be so relieved to know you are back. When Dan and the boys got back last night without you she almost had hysterics. We had a hard time keeping her from sounding a general alarm and getting out the whole colony to hunt for the lost girl. But so long as Reverend Snively did not come in and report failure we thought it best to wait for morning. I couldn't sleep for won-

dering where you were. So I got up early and came out to sweep the porch. I tell you there's nothing like stiff sweeping and making the dust fly if you're worried or cross, even if it isn't hygienic."

They laughed and a little later the rector went to his own cottage and the girls entered theirs.

"She's here!" called Mary up the stairs.

Soon Mrs. Roth and the girls ran down in negligee, all eager to hear an account of the night in the woods.

When Sarah had finished her simple tale, in which she had not divulged the cause of her flight from Dan, Mrs. Roth looked skeptically at her. "So you slept in a tree all night and Reverend Snavelly was in the woods all night too, you say—um, a very thrilling adventure," she said smugly.

Sarah was tempted to mete to her the same chastisement Dan had received at her hands. But the girl merely looked her squarely in the eyes and repeated, "Yes, we were within less than half a mile of each other. If I had known that I should have enjoyed the stars more."

The girl's calm, steady gaze should have warned the woman but she went on heedlessly. "Well, all I can say is I hope it doesn't get out in Fairview that you two were out in the woods all night! It would spoil the rector's reputation. Of course, if you were any other girl, like Mary or one of the others, but with your ——"

"Mrs. Roth!" cried Mary, hot indignation in her voice, "how dare you speak to Sarah like that! She is good as any of us, better than most of us!"

"Thank you, Mary," said Sarah, "but don't waste time trying to convince Mrs. Roth that I'm all wool and a yard wide. You know the old saying about a man convinced against his will. But, Mrs. Roth," she faced

the woman and her eyes gleamed dark, "I want to tell you that you better not try to spoil the good name of Reverend Snively by linking it with mine and a night in the woods! It doesn't matter for me—I'd presumably be 'never the worse for a spot or two on my speckled hide' but don't you besmirch the name of that man! If you gossip about it in Fairview I—well, I'll tell whole Fairview why I ran away from Dan!" And with that to ponder she left Mrs. Roth and went up-stairs to wash and to comb her hair, rather disreputable from its contact with the grape-vines.

Later in the morning Dan came strolling to the girls' cottage. He tried to look innocent and casually concerned.

"Ho, Sarah," he greeted her as she sat in the swing beside Mary, "I see you got back. Were you really lost?"

"No," disclaimed the girl. "I wasn't lost, Mount Gretna was lost."

That was too much for the youth to fathom, but he breathed more easily—Sarah wasn't going to tell after all. She was rather a good sport even if she was squeamish about a little thing like a stolen kiss.

But Dan found that even if the girl kept silent about the adventure in the woods she had no further use for him. He could never manage, contrive as he would, to have one minute alone with her. Hang it, how was a fellow to apologize when she built a wall about herself! Sarah had no wish to hear any apology, all she desired was to have Dan leave her alone.

The last days at Mount Gretna were uneventful. The last one was occupied with packing in which Sarah entered with good will. It was a blessing to have work to

do when her heart ached, for the experience with Dan had left its mark upon her. Her faith in human nature was a bit shaken; she felt humiliated and ashamed of herself for affording an opportunity for the boy's insult. She would be more wary, less gullible. Never again would she trust a man of Dan's calibre, she told herself. Now the rector, he was different! How utterly gentlemanly he had treated her as they had walked through the silent woods to safety.

On the whole the vacation at Mount Gretna was one long to be remembered by the girl whose first pleasure trip it was. There she had gained the confidence of the girls, secured a warm friend in Mary Becker, read another page of weak human nature uncurbed by the superiority of spirit, learned to know the rector better and appreciate his fine qualities anew—as she looked at the cottage for the last time she felt that she had learned many things there.

Grandfather Burkhart greeted her with warm welcome.

"Hello, Sarah, so you got back once!" he called to her before she had entered the big house in Fairview. "Well, I'm glad! It was kinda lonesome here this while past. I said to Sybilla yesterday that it's funny how soon we get used to something and don't want to part with it. Here you been with us just since April and before that the place was still like a church and now since you come it's lively and when you go off for a few weeks we miss you."

"Oh, grandpap, did you miss me?"

"Miss you? Yes."

"Like you'd miss a boil on the neck after it went—like that?" she asked laughingly.

He laughed. Laughs were rare in his life. Sarah

joined in his deep, throaty chuckle and even Sybilla smiled at the girl's words.

"No, Sarah," he told her, "we missed you like we miss the robins when they go away for the winter, didn't we, Sybilla, Mary?"

Sybilla nodded and Mary wiped her eyes on her apron before she could speak. "Laws, Sarah, it was like a cemetery round here. I was for borrowing Mrs. Felker's polly, only they say it swears so ugly still."

Sarah laughed and her eyes shone. She was missed then! Oh, her circle was closing up! The girls had been drawn into it, grandpap and Aunt Mary were inside, and Aunt Sybilla might be near enough to get hauled in at a moment's notice.

"Love and I had the wit to win
We drew a circle that took him in."

She loved them so much they had to love her!

CHAPTER XVI

A DISCOVERY

WHEN Sarah returned from her vacation at Mount Gretna she found her grandfather had decided to turn many of his private affairs of the office over to her. He came to depend upon her more and more, greatly to the chagrin of Dan Roth who had longed for a greater interest in the business at some future day. There was no male heir to the Burkhart family, he reasoned, and some day the old man would want to shift the burden. Then if a capable young man happened to be employed in the office there might be a chance of advancement. But the coming of Sarah had changed some of the plans of old Jeremiah Burkhart. Sarah might marry some day and her husband take over the hardware business, so it would be well for her to become acquainted with some of the routine of the office.

Since the death of the girl's father the old man was devoted to Sarah. The dark-haired, gray-eyed girl could have twisted him about her finger like a supple string. Of course she was a Burkhart but he had to confess there was strong evidence of her mother's blood in her personality. And that mother had been an actress and dancer. Old Jeremiah could not reconcile the old knowledge with new opinions. Some of the things about which he had been so sure all his life were beginning to be hazy with doubts. Was it possible that a person could dance, follow the vain things of the world, and yet be endowed

with so many sterling qualities that the child born to her would be like Sarah? Were not all dancers followers of Satan? He had believed they were. He remembered some of the things his son had revealed to him during those intimate soul-communing days before death ended the revelations. Jeremiah junior had told of the Irish actress wife, her gentleness, kindness, goodness and staunch devotion to him. Surely, Sarah bore evidence of noble qualities that the weak-willed father could not have transmitted to her. Old Jeremiah was perplexed as he tried to puzzle out the world-old riddle. He felt satisfied that his faith was sufficient unto him, that the plain, severe ways of the Mennonites were wholesome and worthy of emulation, but for the first time in his life he wondered whether the conduct of persons outside the sect might be wholly commendable. The man who had been hemmed in by one narrow horizon was looking beyond it and seeing a world of good outside the lines he had drawn. Had he been narrow and selfish? Certainly he could never indulge in any worldly pleasures, but was that sufficient reason for marking them sins? Was there good in everybody and wickedness in the most pious? He, who had prided himself for years upon his square dealing with his fellow men, had been unfair to his own son. He who had been unimpeachable in the matter of outward observances of his religion had failed to practice charity and mercy. The spirit of catholicity stirred in him. What a self-satisfied old sinner he had been when he deemed himself so righteous as to be qualified to arbitrate the destiny of his son! Now, since that girl of the slums and reformatory had come to him and taught him the meaning of the word forgive, along with innumerable other valuable lessons, he could discern good

in the most wretched offenders against all laws of man and God.

It reminded him of the story Mary once told about a town character, an old woman who went to every funeral in and near Fairview and always said something to the credit of the deceased. One day a miserable wretch died, so miserable that none could think of any good quality the optimistic old lady could employ as a last eulogy. Some curious ones lingered near the casket as the old woman came to look at the dead and speak her good word. She gazed long into the still face, then turned to the group who waited for the words and said, "Poor Joe! He always was such a good whistler!" It was true! They remembered then how in the years gone by the man's cheery whistle had floated on the air and often inspired and heartened them.

Old Jeremiah did much thinking those days. The death of his son and the coming of Sarah had opened his eyes to truths hidden from him for years. But the troubles under which he had passed left their stamp upon him. He stooped and looked older. The weight of business seemed to be growing heavy and he welcomed the opportunity to initiate Sarah into the secrets of hardware and give more and more of his affairs into her hands.

The responsibilities thus thrust upon the girl did not dismay her, rather they filled her with pride. Her grandfather trusted her!

One day in September as she sat in the office looking over some bills and making out a list of orders for her grandfather's approval, a strange paper lay before her eyes as she turned over a stack of order sheets. Dan Roth had arranged the papers—what had that one to do with orders? It was a white sheet the same size as the

others, but its surface was covered with her grandfather's name. Some twenty copies of it were written closely, one under the other, copy-book style, Jeremiah Burkhart. At first glance she thought it her grandfather's handwriting, then she looked more closely. It was a clever, successful attempt to copy the writing of the owner of the hardware store! Who had done it? Who but Dan? A great suspicion woke in her heart. Had Dan tried to write like her grandfather? For what purpose? The paper fell from her hand. She was grateful that Dan was not in the office. She must hide it before he returned. But she sat and looked at it dumfounded. The writer had had difficulty with the old-fashioned script of Jeremiah Burkhart's day. The curly B was hard to copy and the slant writing had been almost impossible to do well—Dan wrote vertical writing. The last names at the bottom of the page were remarkably like the signature of the old man. Oh, what had she stumbled upon? Was Dan daring to—but no! He was a silly young boy who needed some hard bumps to bring him to his senses but surely he would not be guilty of forgery! What an ugly word! She shivered at the thought of it. Determined to keep watch over the boy she stuffed the paper into her blouse and applied herself to the bills and orders. "I'll keep two eyes on Dan Roth," she decided. "He needn't think he can cheat my grandfather! He'll stand watching, I'm thinking."

She took the incriminating paper home and placed it in her bureau drawer. "Now for some Sherlock Holmes shrewdness," she told herself.

Dan did not discover the loss of the paper. He had made many such attempts to copy the name, then torn them into shreds. But he wondered why Sarah looked

at him so keenly when he returned to the office. "Ah," he thought complacently, "guess she's coming round! Give her time and she'll be eating out of my hand. She's deuced good-looking but as proud as Lucifer." However, he liked girls with spirit, ones you had to fight to get. Not that he wanted to marry her—far from it! Though, when he came to think about it, she would be a good catch for she would some day inherit all the Burkhart money. She was the last of that family and Fairview said Jeremiah was one of its richest men. No, he wouldn't think of marrying her, the little wildcat! How she stung his face that day in the woods! But he'd get even some day. He'd make her like him and then trot off and forget her. He could dance and not pay the piper. Of course he would have to be careful not to make the old man doubt him for he wanted to hold on to the position in the office. He would have to walk circumspectly to please the old man. Pshaw! Only for that he'd pay back that upstart who acted as though a Roth were not good enough for her! He'd try to make her care for him, though, to save his pride.

However, Sarah gave him no encouragement. Every overture for friendliness she met with cool indifference, until he became more and more eager to win her friendship. His mother was pleased by the girl's refusal to have any semblance of friendship with Dan, yet she, too, resented Sarah's haughty scorn of Dan. What a shame, thought Mrs. Roth, that all the Burkhart money would go to a girl like that! If she were a different type Dan might have feathered his nest very nicely by marrying her. But much as Mrs. Roth liked money and little as she had at her command, she felt that ambitions would be gratified at too costly a price if the money were se-

cured by Dan's marriage with the daughter of a convict. She still thanked heaven that her family was free from such taints. She hoped Sarah would never care for him.

Mrs. Roth might have spared herself any disquietude on that subject. Sarah had no intentions of angling for Dan. In fact she regretted deeply any former friendliness for she knew that what had happened she had brought upon herself. "I ran around with Dan to get his mother's goat and the goat turned and butted me," she thought whimsically.

Then, too, the girl had other things to claim her attention. Since her return from the mountains her days had been filled so full that she felt certain she was, at last, experiencing all the thrills and busy times other girls knew. Working in the store and office, helping in the house and garden, during the long autumn days, the hours were all too short. Sometimes when evening came Mary Becker and a few of the other girls stopped and asked her to go for one of the long walks round the town or they stopped at the home of one of the crowd and sat in friendly fashion on the porch and laughed and exchanged confidences as she had so longed to do during those first days of her ostracism. Every Saturday afternoon she accompanied one of the aunts "up-town," which meant in Fairview walking up the shaded streets to the business section and buying provisions for the week-end. When Sarah went along, a big basket on her arm, she felt most important, though the packages in her basket held such ordinary contents as coffee, dried beef or cheese. At last she was sharing in a real home and each detail of it was glorified in her eyes.

Since the return from Mount Gretna the Reverend Snively had an odd, puzzling way of being friendly one

day and distant the next. At times it hurt her. Had she fallen in his estimation since that day she was lost in the woods? Why did he wear that air of cool aloofness, that look of a desire to keep out of contact with her? Then her old bravado came to her rescue and she went about humming gay songs, laughing at nothings, not daring to confess to herself that the songs were loudest when the heart ached most.

However, sometimes the rector jumped across the hedge and joined Sarah on the porch and then she imagined she could detect on his face an expression of I-don't-care-I-had-to-come! At such times Aunt Sybilla did not welcome him very cordially. She was suspicious and remembered Mrs. Roth's information that he had a penchant for making love to girls then leaving them to regret. The lonely girl from Sunset Mountain had entered far enough into the affections of the grim old aunt to claim her protection. She wasn't goin' to have any 'Piscopal preacher make a fool of her niece! Why had the girl ever joined the 'Piscopal Church? Why did they have to live next door to the preacher of it? Heathenish doin's they had in that church, just about like them Catholics she heard a'ready! So Aunt Sybilla sat, a silent, watchful guardian when the rector called. Their conversation did not interest her. She wondered where Sarah had learned to talk such funny things, all about poetry and books and things nobody knew years ago. If they had discussed the weather and crops and wondered how much Felkers' new automobile cost or whether old Dan Miller would get the electric lights put in his house next fall like he promised his wife, then there would have been some sense in sitting on a porch for three hours talking. Sometimes they talked about religion and then

the girl said things that made her aunt think a missionary would not be amiss in the Burkhart home. For instance, one day the girl said to the rector, "I think the biggest hypocrites I ever knew were church people."

"Yes," agreed the man, "but remember, there never was a counterfeit without a genuine."

Then Sarah looked thoughtful and admitted she had no answer to that, and the preacher went on, "Don't you know that the worst scamps in the world like to hide behind the best things?"

"Yes. I have been prejudiced. I am beginning to understand some things that were dark to me."

Aunt Sybilla gasped then, for the man laid his hand upon the girl's arm and said, "You are too fine to be skeptical or cynical." The woman wondered why he didn't use words abody could understand.

When October came with its cool days and fires the girl in the big Burkhart house experienced another series of thrills. It was delightful to run to the cellar and put on drafts, call to Aunt Sybilla about the fires, and feel she was needed. When they sat in the cozy sitting-room by the lamp she discovered what an interesting companion her grandfather could be. He had many stories of his youth tucked away in his brain, stories that had been handed down from other generations. Some were about ancestors who had lived in Lancaster County during the time of Indians, when massacres occurred and the shotgun was kept within reach. Then of later days, during the great Civil War, when the enemy soldiers had reached the Susquehanna and the people fled in terror past the old farmhouse in which they lived, fled in Conestoga wagons with their worldly possessions and children mixed promiscuously under the white canvas.

Each story of that sturdy pioneer stock was more charming to the girl than any colorful tale of Ulysses. They were her people, from them she had sprung!

When cold weather came Aunt Mary brought out a popper and taught the girl how to make popcorn balls and taffy after ancient recipes handed down from grandmothers long dead. Aunt Mary even manœvered until Sybilla gave her consent to a taffy pull in the Burkhart kitchen. One night eight girls from the class came to the kitchen that had never known such jollity for many years and with the help of Aunt Mary pans of taffy were cooked and then pulled until hands were blistered and everything sticky. It was Sarah's first party and she reveled in it.

Aunt Sybilla was the habitual wet-blanket. She couldn't see the use "makin' such candy that sticks to false teeth like shoemaker's wax. Now peppermints and lemon drops were more fit to eat! All she wanted was that they should wash the tables right so the sticky mess gets off!"

Sarah was having the time of her life those days and she frankly admitted it to the three in the big house with her.

"You are so good to me I won't ever want to go away from here."

"Away! What made you think of such a thing?" asked the old man. "Were you thinkin' of such a thing? Ain't this your home?"

"I don't want to go, but don't you ever get tired of having me around?"

"Ach, don't talk so dumb!" came Aunt Sybilla's crisp command. "I guess now we got used to you we want to keep you, till you get married, anyhow."

"Married!" echoed the grandfather. "Any boys sneakin' round here and I don't know it?"

"No," Sarah hastened to assure him. "Dan Roth is the only boy in Fairview who ever talks to me except passing the time, and he's not the kind I like. But I'm not wanting any beaus. I'm too happy having you people to think about such things. Haven't I two aunts and a grandpap? What more could I want?"

"Yes, but wait once," Aunt Mary shook her head wisely, "old aunts are all right, but when that nice young man comes along that's the right one we won't count."

So Aunt Mary knew something about romance after all, decided the girl. She had taken it for granted that the woman had never had any love affairs. And yet could a woman who had never known the softening influence of love with all its humanizing tenderness have in her bosom a heart like that Aunt Mary constantly revealed?

"Aunt Mary," she asked her when they were alone, "tell me about your romances."

"Ach—why ——" a flush crept across her face, a tender smile as if she were drawing from years long dead a precious treasure. "I haven't much to tell. Only once did I like a man, a nice one he was and we would have been happy. But just when we were promised your—Jerry went away and then mom died and Sybilla had her trouble and I said I didn't see how I could go off and be married and be happy and let pop and Sybilla alone in this big house and so much trouble with them. So we said we'd wait a while till things got a little settled. Then the next year he got the typhoid from bad water where he boarded down the country and he died. I always blamed myself thinking that if we'd married

he wouldn't boarded there and mebbe would be livin' yet. But abody can't know what's the best to do sometimes."

"Aunt Mary!" Sarah twined her arm about the neck of the woman and drew the white-capped head down for a kiss. "Here I was thinking you never had any trouble and you had the real one and it left you sweet and kind, while Aunt Sybilla ——"

"Sh, Sarah! It ain't nice to talk about poor Sybilla, for not everybody can take trouble the same way."

"No, it takes a big heart to meet it like you did!"

CHAPTER XVII

COALS OF FIRE

As the Christmas season drew near Sarah could have shouted her joy aloud through the streets of Fairview. Everything seemed to be working together for her happiness; no clouds marred her days. Aunt Mary and Aunt Sybilla began making delicious cookies and cakes in such quantities that some of the baking was done at night and Sarah found time to help. As she stood elbow deep in flour and rolled the cookies and pressed shellbark kernels into them she was happier than she had ever been before. She was anticipating many thrills as she looked forward to Christmas morning when those same cookies would be placed in baskets and carried through the frosty streets to numerous friends and relatives, or needy ones to whom the aunts were Lady Bountifuls on Christmas day.

The matter of presents for the family engrossed her attention and afforded many hours of exciting contemplation. Grandfather should have a big box of chocolates of the finest she could buy in Lancaster. Aunt Sybilla should be presented with a bottle of perfume, having one day confessed she always wanted some but considered it a sinful waste of money. Aunt Mary would find at her plate Christmas morning a hand-colored picture of her mother to place on her bureau. She had seen one in the town and wished she could have their mother's done like that and put in a gilt frame.

The girl planned it with little flutterings of the heart. She would give them things they wanted—white hyacinths for once! Her earnings in the store had been saved, part of them placed in bank and marked in the little book duly inspected and approved of by the aunts and grandfather. But each week the girl had kept from her pay some portion of it to spend on little things dear to the heart of femininity. Recently she had pared down on those personal expenditures so that when she counted the amount reserved for gifts she found fifty-five dollars. "Hooray! that means I can buy all the things for my people, send a box to Mrs. Maloney, a gift to Miss Hughes, and still have some money left to get those new shoes Aunt Sybilla says I must buy. This is going to be the gladdest, merriest Christmas I have ever known! I won't need any one to 'call-me-early,-mother-dear.' I'll be up before daylight."

But Sarah Burkhart reckoned without fate!

The very day before she intended to take the important shopping trip to Lancaster she was alone in the office. Grandfather was at home with a slight cold. Sarah had been given directions about some banking business to be attended to and other urgent matters and had bent over her desk all morning to dispose of the work. Some canceled checks were on hand for filing; she looked them over, and a cry escaped her. Quickly stifling it with a cough she made sure that no person was watching her and then bent over the check in her hand. It was made out in favor of Dan Roth, fifty dollars, signed by Jeremiah Burkhart, endorsed and cashed. But the signature of Jeremiah Burkhart was the same as that on the practice sheet she had discovered and kept. It had passed the observant bank employee and would have

passed her if the memory of that sheet in her bureau drawer were not fresh in her mind.

The demon of revenge that sleeps in every human heart awoke and exulted and danced. Here was a chance to humiliate Mrs. Roth! Her Dan, her boasted Dan, was a forger! No longer could she look sanctimoniously upward and thank heaven there was no criminal in her family. Sarah tucked the check in her waist. She nodded her head in satisfaction and thought, "I guess people like Mrs. Roth get their comeuppance if we wait long enough."

When Dan came into the office, in a flurry of eagerness to finish the work as soon as possible and be free for the holidays, the girl looked at him while he bent over his books. How young he was and attractive in a way! His face was appealing in spite of the too-full lips. He did not have the appearance of a criminal. Would he be sentenced to the penitentiary—the word chilled her to the marrow. She had a vision of the place she had visited to see her father. Would Dan be placed there or in some similar building? What chance for manhood had he after release from it? What would his mother do in his absence? "Ah," she tossed her head, "I don't care what happens to either of them! They have been rotten to me and I'm going to pay them back! I'll never have another chance like this! The fates are with me this time!" She gloated over the prospect like a miser over his gold. She'd take the check to Mrs. Roth and prove what a son was hers, then she'd give it to her grandfather and let him deal with the offender.

After supper she ran up to her room and compared the writing on the check with that on the paper in her drawer. There was the same little imperfection in the r,

the indecision and wavering of the J, and in writing fifty Dan had used an f unlike her grandfather's. Sarah curled her lips—"He's a dumb forger. I could have done better than that!"

She replaced the paper in the drawer and thought of some errand to account to the inquisitive aunts for her visit to the house across the street.

Dan and his mother were alone, sitting in the sitting-room. The girl's heart sank a trifle as she glanced through the windows into the lighted room and saw the home picture of the two about the rose-colored lamp. But her lips tightened next instant and she knocked at the door.

Mrs. Roth's face frankly expressed wonder as Dan ushered the visitor into the room. "You want to see me?"

"You and Dan."

"Whew!" whistled the boy boldly, "I suppose if dad were living you'd include him—sort of a family party, eh!"

Sarah looked at him and scorned to answer his remark, then she burst out boldly, "Dan Roth, why did grandfather give you a check for fifty dollars?"

The youth paled, then tried to bluff. "Oh," he said convincingly, "he often does that. When there are little bills to pay he writes a big check and I get it cashed and then pay the bills, when they're to people in town."

"What do you mean?" said the mother indignantly. "You dare to think that because your father did such things my Dan would stoop to them? How can you insinuate such a crime! You better leave the house before I show you where the carpenter left a hole!"

"Oh, no, I'm not going yet, I'm not through! Dan

Roth, perhaps grandfather does write checks to you but he didn't write that one! Some time ago you left one of your practice sheets where it fell into my hands—a very imprudent thing to do! I compared that with the check and found them alike."

"Sarah!" came the agonized cry of Dan, then he hung his head.

"You better be scared; forger isn't a very nice word."

"Will you go!" cried the mother frantically. "How do you dare accuse Dan of such a thing!"

"I have proof of it."

"Dan!" But Dan could not meet the gaze of his mother.

"The jig's up," he confessed. "I did do it."

"Dan!" The mother gave one cry then sank back in her chair. She didn't faint but all feeling seemed to flow from her. No, it could never be true. Her boy could not be guilty of such a thing! Her proud spirit was crushed. "Dan, say it isn't true, that it's all a hideous mistake!" she implored.

"I can't, mother. I'm rotten! It was the first one I forged——"

"Oh, don't use that dreadful word!"

"Well," said Sarah with the cloying sweetness of a fiend, "what will you thank heaven for now since you lost your pet one about not having a criminal in the family?"

"Sarah," the youth was wretchedly humble, "say anything to me but don't be hard on mother. She's always been so proud of me, bragged me up sky-high. This will kill her."

"Um—you should have thought of that sooner." The

girl stood like an obdurate Nemesis. "Now"—she addressed Mrs. Roth—"you know how I felt when you rubbed it in about my father."

"Oh, Sarah, I was rotten too! I'm sorry—forgive me."

But Sarah stood rigid. She had no desire to forgive. Some of the Burkhart stubbornness ruled her. "It's easy to say forgive when you get in a pinch."

"But I mean it," the woman repeated. "I'm sorry for everything I said about you. I want you to know that, even if you don't believe it. If there'll be any satisfaction to you to know that my heart is broken because of Dan then you may have that satisfaction right now. Your grandfather—what does he think about it? After he trusted Dan and was so good to him! But I spoiled Dan from a baby, I guess. He was all I had after his father died and I spoiled him. What will your grandfather do?"

Something seemed to break in Sarah's heart. "Why," she said more gently, "he doesn't know about it."

Hope dawned for an instant in the tear-stained face of the mother. "Then just you know about it?"

"Mother!" cried Dan, guessing the mother's thoughts, "don't ask Sarah to keep it from him! After the rotten way I've treated her no one can blame her for taking the chance to get even."

"What do you think I am, Dan Roth?" she flared, resenting their thinking her capable of doing the very thing she had come to do! Then there came to her the memory of her father's wretchedness, the wasted years behind a walled domain, the sorrow visited upon others because of his sin. That memory weighed with all that was noble in her nature and she turned to the boy and said, "If I

don't tell will you promise to behave yourself and never do such a thing again?"

"Sarah! If you could do that! But you're just teasing me as a cat does a mouse."

"Um, much you know about me, Dan Roth! You Dutch never can understand the Irish! I guess if there's one word I've learned the meaning of it's FORGIVE. You promise what I ask and I'll fix things up so no one will ever know it but we three."

"Sarah!" Mrs. Roth grabbed the girl's hand.

"Come on," said the girl, wrenching loose and falling into the slang of Red Rose Court, "let's get the thing over before somebody butts in. Dan Roth, will you promise to let other people's money where it belongs and never be dishonest again or give your mother such a scare?"

"I promise." He put his hand on his heart.

"Good! Here goes!" She pulled the forged check from her dress and held it before them. Then she walked to the gas log and threw the paper into the flames which speedily devoured it.

"Sarah," the woman faltered, "how can I thank you?"

"By not thanking me at all. But perhaps some day you'll meet another girl like me who has had a clouded past and if you could be kind to her ——"

"Child, you're an angel!"

"No, I'm not! Angels have golden hair, not black locks and freckles." For the first time that evening the girl smiled. "I haven't got any wings sprouting on me yet so you could notice them. I'll tell you the truth—I came over here determined to make you and Dan crawl and then I meant to take that check straight to my grand-

father and clap my hands while Dan got his punishment and you suffered with him. Now you see I'm as bad as anybody. It was only when you said something about forgiving that I got my sense back."

"Sarah, I'll go straight after this. In these ten minutes I lived through all the horrors of twenty years in jail. Your grandfather might discover it, though, then what would happen?"

"What he doesn't know won't hurt him. But we have to fix his account at once. Have you the money to make it good?"

Dan shook his head. "I spent it in Lancaster last week. And mother was just saying before you came that we have to economize until New Year when she gets her next check. We spent everything for the holidays, gifts, turkey and so on."

"I tell you, Dan, I have fifty I don't need now. I'll put it to bank in grandfather's name and you can pay me back when you get it."

"Say"—there was a wholesome admiration and reverence in his eyes as he looked at her—"you don't do things by halves, do you?"

"No, I swallow the whole thing, bait, hook, line and sinker!"

"You're a wonder. I was a rotten brute that day at Mount Gretna! Mother, I grabbed Sarah and kissed her and would have kissed her ten times more if she hadn't run away from me! Now you know what a contemptible thing I've been! But I'm cured, I'm going straight! I'm going to be what you thought I was, a son to be proud of."

"Well, Dan Roth, you ought to be!" spoke up Sarah. "You have a mother to be proud of you or nurse a

broken heart because of you. Don't you know how much that means? To have a mother—if I had one ——” She turned away and pressed back the tears.

Dan stepped up to her then and took her hands. “Sarah, you are saving me from disgrace. I'll never forget it!” He bent his head and lifted her hands to his lips. Then he released them and looked at her, all his earnest awakened young soul in his eyes.

“You're an angel!” he told her.

She answered lightly to relieve the seriousness of the moment. “If everybody keeps telling me I am one I'll soon be thinking I'm dead! We won't ever say anything about this again; just hand me the fifty when you have it and that's the end.”

They would have detained her, smothered her with thanks and incoherent murmurings of eternal devotion for her goodness but she laughed them away and ran from the house. In her heart was a lasting impression of the divine quality of mercy. She felt sorry for the two who still had the companionship of troubled consciences. After all, she reflected, gossipers do themselves more harm than those they gossip about. Dan and his mother would have seared scars in their hearts for a long time because of the boy's deviation from the straight and narrow path. For the first time she felt sorry for them and saw in them only human beings frail as others, needing the help of other mortals, even her help. She knew now the meaning of that phrase, “To err is human, to forgive divine.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HEART OF A RECTOR

THE Reverend James Snaveley stepped upon the Roth porch. Ever since his entering upon the duties of the little parish in Fairview he had taken an interest in Dan, along with other impulsive, heedless youths of the town. He had encouraged Dan's natural love of reading and from time to time had taken him books to enjoy.

After the manner of small town familiarity the rector used the side-door entrance instead of formally ringing the bell. That evening he hummed as he mounted the steps. Christmas was in the air and the rector of St. Paul's always felt the tugging of its eternal heart interest. The windows of the Roth house attracted him. He wished some of the residents of the town who lived behind closed shutters as soon as evening fell would copy Mrs. Roth and have their lights streaming out their cheer on dark nights. Idly musing on that subject he stooped a bit and glanced into the room without any intention of spying, for Dan and his mother usually were alone at that hour. What he saw as he stood by the open window made him draw back as if struck by an unexpected missile. By the light of the rose-shaded lamp he saw Dan bending over the uplifted hands of Sarah Burkhart, then print a kiss upon them. What did that mean? Upon what romance had he inadvertently stumbled? Dan and Sarah—Sarah and Dan—to care for each other? He could scarcely credit it, yet there they stood face to face and the girl made no objection to the caress. Doubt-

less the presence of Mrs. Roth prevented a more demonstrative kiss. The rector walked away from the window, down the steps and across the street to his own home. He had no desire to enter that house then. The scene he had witnessed left him trembling, dismayed, unhappy. Fool that he had been! *He* wanted Sarah, of course he did! But he had been too blind to recognize love or, if the truth be told, he had fought against confessing that love. He had deliberately closed his heart to the heaven-sent emotion. Fool, fool! He condemned himself. Was there ever a girl like Sarah, so sweet, tender, big-hearted, so desirable! He ran through the list of women he knew—they all paled beside the dark-haired, gray-eyed Dutch-Irish girl whose father had been a convict and she herself a child of the slums and reform school. What did that matter, what did anything matter except that he loved her? And he had lost her by his slow, poky ambling along. He had walked with Sarah, talked with her, consoled and advised her, comforted her in sorrow, and through all the blessed intimacy he had gone with clay upon his eyes. Perhaps he might have won her love if he had utilized his opportunities. If she could care for that shallow Dan—that hour the rector was more man than minister and he wanted to run across the street and snatch the girl into his arms and declare to the world she was his by right of love! If she could come to care for Dan surely she could have cared for him, a man of finer development and understanding. How smug and complacent he had been, how unmindful of the presence of the little God of Arrows! And then when he feared the inroads of the Blind God how he had set up a barricade of convention, fear of Mrs. Grundy, and false pride to keep the miracle from his life! He dubbed himself

an asinine fool as he entered the house and thought of the radiant young lovers across the street.

An hour later he crossed the street once more. Mrs. Roth greeted him and he noted that her face bore evidences of recent tears; her eyes were red from copious weeping.

"Can I help?" he asked kindly.

"No, oh, no! I have been crying but just tears of joy. I'm so happy!"

"I'm glad——" never a preacher of the Gospel lied more valiantly. He was not glad, his heart ached. Well might she be happy if her son had conferred upon him the honor of winning Sarah's love!

"Yes, I'm so happy! I wish I could tell you about it, but I—I promised Dan I would keep it a secret. But it's him I'm happy about. I feel he is going to fulfil my dreams about him and become a fine young man, one I can be proud of. I'm so happy!" She was almost babbling in her relief from the anxiety about Dan. Her heart was soft and her eyes welled with tears like those of a lacrimose child. To have so dreadful a tragedy averted by the mercy of Sarah was more than she had expected. She had the gossip's respect for the noble, altruistic conduct of others and, in spite of all her mean, pernicious tongue and her love of lurid scandals, she could appreciate what the girl had done.

"Oh," she said feelingly, "I want to tell you that I think Sarah Burkhart is the dearest, finest girl I ever met!"

"Yes—she is very fine."

"There ain't a word in the whole English language to describe her!" declared the mother effusively. "I thank heaven she came to this town!"

The man suppressed a smile. In spite of his aching heart he saw the humor of the words, remembered how often Mrs. Roth had thanked heaven for lesser blessings. What could have happened to turn her into so eager a champion of Sarah? What, except that Dan and the girl had come to an understanding in love and by some magic the mother had been won from her antagonism to an appreciation of the girl whose rare qualities and personality were phenomenal in Fairview?

The rector left the book for Dan and went home, more than ever convinced that his inference was well founded. Then it was too late, forever too late, like the foolish virgins' knock at the door!

His unhappiness was not lessened the following day when he was seated in his study preparing the sermon for the coming Sabbath and Sarah's voice came to him in song. He had heard her frequently since her arrival at the house next door. Her voice was not more than ordinarily sweet or strong, but it was tuneful and, like her laugh, had a quality that attracted. The songs she sang were generally merry, bubbling ones, but that day it was a new note, the old one of pure romance and sentiment written by the inimitable Thomas Moore, "Believe me if all those endearing young charms."

The man paused in the attempt to write a sermon. The last words of the song rang into his consciousness with the resonance of a silver bell:

"No, the heart that has truly loved, never forgets,
But as truly loves on to the close:—
As the sunflower turns on her god when he sets,
The same look which she turned when he rose."

The Reverend Snavelly bowed his head upon the desk

and gave himself up to grief and regret. He never doubted the truthfulness of those words. Could he ever forget Sarah, the child-woman? Sarah, adorable, whimsical yet strong and courageous, brave to stand for the right and meeting the taunts of her inferiors with that irresistible poise and calm that she had inherited from her actress mother. Sarah—ah, she was more precious than mintage of gold and he had lost her!

CHAPTER XIX

SUSPICION

SARAH's long-planned shopping trip to Lancaster lost some of its potential thrills that night after the burning of the forged check as she sat alone and counted the worldly goods at her disposal for Christmas gifts. She feared to touch the money deposited in bank, for she had too often exhibited proudly her bank-book and its figures were familiar to the rest of the household. She counted her ready cash—five dollars and thirty-two cents! What about the lovely gifts she had planned to buy? The beautifully unnecessary gifts she wanted to buy? She sighed but did not regret the temporary loss of her fifty dollars, for was not the peace of mind of a mother—even Mrs. Roth—worth more than white hyacinth gifts? Was not the reclamation of a boy—even Dan Roth—more to be desired than paltry perfume, gilt-frame pictures, chocolates? She wasted no time in bemoaning the slimness of her pocketbook, but with characteristic buoyancy set to work with paper and pencil to see how elastic she could make those five dollars and thirty-two cents. How could she squeeze from it the last penny's worth of joy for others?

She would buy cheaper candy or a smaller box—one dollar for that! Perfume at seventy-five cents, the lowest; a gilt frame and picture already ordered came to the now-appalling sum of two dollars. She would have to buy Miss Hughes an insignificant handkerchief and one for Mary Becker. That would leave seventy-five cents for

a gift for Mrs. Maloney and she had meant to send her a box of nuts, candy and luxuries she knew never came to Red Rose Court except in parsimonious portions. Well, at any rate, she was thankful for handkerchiefs!

"They are such a blessing for the shopper! They fill so many gaps, are so handy to send and of course, *everybody needs handkerchiefs!* That has been said from the first day of their invention! If your money is low or you don't know what under the sun to buy for her or him you just walk to the handkerchief counter, close your eyes, say 'Eeney, meeney, miney, moe,' and stab at one, and the one you touch you buy. It requires so little expenditure of gray matter or discrimination, for a handkerchief's a handkerchief! I can't buy those new shoes I was going to get before Christmas, but my old ones will do. I'll just keep quiet about shoes and after the holidays I'll get them."

But Aunt Sybilla did not forget about the shoes. She considered it her duty to see that the girl was supplied with all necessary articles of clothing. The unessentials, like gloves, veils and such frivolities, she left to Sarah, but shoes were a necessity and she was horrified at the very idea of any one having less than two pairs, one for Sundays, the other for week-days.

"Sarah," she announced one night at supper several days after the fifty dollars had changed hands, "I seen the shoe man to-day and he said his new ones come in. You better go up and pick out a pair before Christmas yet, else they get picked over so. We can go to-morrow if you get out the store a little early."

Sarah swallowed—how to parry for time—"Why," she said sweetly, "I decided not to get the shoes until after the holidays."

"What for?"

"Oh, I don't need them right away and——" she floundered.

"Not need them! With only one Sunday pair and your week-day ones needin' solin'. You must fetch them to the shoemaker now and you need another pair, that's sure."

"Why, bless your heart," said the girl, "when I lived in Red Rose Court I was lucky to have one whole pair."

Aunt Sybilla threw up her hands in a horrified gesture. "My, to think our Jeremiah's girl would come so low as to have only one pair of shoes!"

Aunt Mary and grandfather made soft sounds of dismay with their lips. They, too, found the thought of such abject poverty too sad to contemplate. But the diversion was too trivial to side-track Sybilla permanently from the matter to be considered.

"Then it's high time you always have plenty shoes. You got to get them shoes right away. I'll go up with you to-morow."

Sarah knew the futility of trying to evade the issue. "Aunt Sybilla, I have no money for them now."

"No money! Didn't you say the other day you got over fifty dollars for shoes and presents? You ain't spent all that?"

"Most of it."

"Goodness-a-life, what for?"

Before the girl could answer grandpap laid his knife and fork across his plate and addressed her. "Sarah, mebbe it ain't my business what you do with your money when you earn it, but I can't see you wasting it and not try to stop you. Money ain't picked off the streets. How did you spend so much?"

"I—I didn't really spend it. I loaned it to some one."

"Oh, then you got a note for it and will get it back."

"I'll get it back but I have no note for it."

"What for kind of business is that? To loan money without gettin' any writin' for it! Thought you knew more than that! I'd like to know, anyhow, what for anybody loans money off you. Ain't they able to get it out the bank?" The old-time severity sounded in his voice.

"I can't tell you about it. I can't ever tell you, so please don't ask me."

Her apparent confusion and unwillingness to tell the truth aroused the suspicion of Aunt Sybilla. "Sarah," she began, "don't you play no tricks on us. Your grand-pap is too good to you for you to do what you can't tell him about. Better let him know who's borrowin' money off you."

But the girl shook her head once more. "I can't! I had to do it, but I can't tell you about it."

"Well," sniffed the woman, "it looks mighty funny to me."

"Sybilla!" Aunt Mary's voice interjected. "Don't make on you think Sarah done what ain't right. Sometimes there's things abody can't tell about but they ain't bad."

Sarah voiced her appreciation—"You know I didn't do anything wrong with the money!"

"Yes, be sure I do. So do the others, only they look for trouble too quick. I guess I'm a softy but I don't think a person does bad until I know. I know you are all right."

"Let's hope so," said the elder sister with a solemn expression. "There's been trouble enough in this family without Sarah makin' more."

"Aunt Sybilla!" The girl's voice rang through the room, but the woman walked away from her and left behind a troubled heart in the bosom of Sarah.

"She doesn't trust me yet," thought the girl. "I counted her inside that circle too soon."

"Don't you mind her," the other aunt consoled her. "She's had so much trouble that she's a little sour sometimes."

"Then for heaven's sake why doesn't she put an end to her trouble and act like a human being?"

"Sarah," spoke up the old man, "mebbe Sybilla and I are a little too hard on you but I guess we don't have the knack of handlin' young people. We're set in our ways, but I think we are a little better than we used to be since you came."

"Grandpap, then you do like to have me here?"

"Now, ain't I told you that long a'ready! You're gettin' short-minded and you ain't near so old as I am yet."

Sarah smiled. She knew that in spite of curiosity about the money the man trusted her. She was dubious about Aunt Sybilla's trust in her. That determined person would try to worm out of the girl the secret of the money. Sarah set her lips—wild horses could not drag it from her!

Aunt Sybilla said nothing more about the matter for several days, greatly to the relief of the girl. She wanted her Christmas to be unspoiled by nagging or lack of harmony. It was her first one in a real home and at the thought little thrills ran and cavorted in her heart. She regretted that she was too old for the delights of a tree and a mysterious Santa Claus but, nevertheless, there remained sufficient cause for happiness. She would have the pleasure of giving gifts to her family!

Three days before Christmas she said to the aunts, "Oh, I can hardly wait for the day! I'm sorry I'm not little enough to believe in Santa and hang up my stocking."

"Santa Claus!" Aunt Sybilla said the name as though it had some evil significance. "We don't learn our children such lies!"

"Oh, you mean you never believed in Santa Claus?"

"No, be sure not! There ain't any such person. What for should we tell children there is?"

"I don't know, but it seems to me there is a Santa Claus, lots of them. They may not always come down the chimney but there are some in the world. Don't you believe in fairies, either?"

"What for? Spooks and such things are heathen and not fit for Christian people to believe in."

"Oh, Aunt Sybilla, but I do feel sorry for you!"

The words rang so truthfully that the woman turned from her work to look at the girl. "Sorry for *me*! Me, with such a good home and everything I need or want!"

"And not one snitch of romance or real fun in your make-up! Can't you see anything more than a flower in the red geraniums you have in the front room now?"

"What else could abody see but geraniums?"

"Why," Sarah laughed, "every time I go into that room I talk to them. They seem like little fairies dancing round a fire on a cold night."

"Are you ferhexed, or what?"

Mary laughed. "Guess me and Sarah's alike in some ways then, for pansies always look like little old ladies in caps when I look at them, and the sweet alyssum makes me think of clean white babies."

"Ach, my goodness! You two must be funny in the

heads! It wonders me how you can think of such dumb things." She looked worried about the evident degeneration of her close kin.

"I'm going over to the rector's to borrow a book," said Sarah. "I need something to read to keep me from fidgeting while I wait for Christmas. I saw him go uptown and I'll hurry and get one from the housekeeper before he comes back."

"All right," said Aunt Sybilla. As she looked after the girl she thought, "Something ails that girl! She acts too dumb! I just wish I could find out where them fifty dollars went!"

CHAPTER XX

THE CARDINAL FLOWER

SARAH found the rector out as she had anticipated. The old housekeeper told her to walk into the front room where the books were and help herself.

The array of long shelves, such prodigal wealth of literature, placed her in the quandary of a child who is asked to choose one toy from a tempting assortment. She drew out a book and found, tucked at the back of the shelf and apparently hidden, a small leather-bound copy of Sonnets from the Portuguese. It was well worn and the pages opened—her heart thumped and throbbed! The red cardinal flower she had picked at Mount Gretna and given to the rector lay in the book, pressed and beautiful even though dead. She turned it over and her glance was held by the sonnet on that page. It was a much-penciled, underlined sonnet and the words of it sprang up to meet her eyes:

“Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. . . .
. . . . The widest land
Doom takes to part us leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears the name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.”

And underneath the last line was written in the rector's hand the exclamation, "My Madonna of the Curb, how can I let you go?"

Sarah closed the book and thrust it back to its hiding-place, a feeling of panic in her heart. What had she done? Whom did he mean? Ah, she remembered that he had once called her "The Madonna of the Curb!" Was it true, did he mean her? Then why the words, "How can I let you go?"—what did they mean? Did he feel that way about her—oh, it could not be! Surely it was some dream, some wild flight of her impulsive Irish imagination! How dared she harbor the thought? He could not have meant her! Yet there lay the scarlet flower, pressed and kept, like a very heart of love against the words of the sonnet. With trembling fingers she took from the shelf a volume of Stevenson and tried to still her hammering heart by reading the words of the gentle invalid. Those pages, too, were lined and marked. It was evident that the author was a favorite with the rector. Sarah turned over the pages, culling here a helpful expression, finding there a new setting for an old thought. Her eyes fell on a marked paragraph. "A happy man or woman is a better thing to find than a five-pound note. He or she is a radiating focus of good-will; and their entrance into a room is as though another candle had been lighted. We need not care whether they could prove the forty-seventh proposition; they do a better thing than that, they practically demonstrate the great Theorem of the Liveableness of Life."

She turned at a sound and the rector stood in the room.

"Good-evening," he said. "I am sorry that on the rare occasions you honor my house with a visit I am out."

"But I came for a book, not to see you." Then her

face flushed at the seeming unkindness. "I mean—I really did come for a book."

"Yes, I understand," he replied gravely, his eyes believing the gravity of his voice. "Don't run away, please. I haven't seen you for some time. It's perfectly proper, you know. The housekeeper is old enough to qualify for chaperone and the shades are all up so the world can see you here and wonder what trouble you have encountered to make you seek the rectory for counsel."

"You're foolish to-night," she told him, but her manner implied that she liked his rare moods of flippancy.

"What were you reading? Find anything good?"

"This." She held up Stevenson.

"I like Robert Louis, he's an old favorite of mine. As a child I heard his verses read by my mother and I have never lost my love for him. It's a blessing to look back to those years and remember my mother reading ——"

He looked up suddenly and was shocked by the pale, twitching face of the visitor.

"Sarah! Forgive me! That was thoughtless of me! I didn't mean to hurt you. I wouldn't have done that for worlds!"

"Oh, don't mind me," she smiled then. "I'm just a little sore on the point of what I lost when I lost my mother. You'd think I should be calloused by this time but when you spoke a moment ago it made me feel the old hurt. Go on, please tell me about your mother. I'm not such a dog-in-the-manger that I can't enjoy hearing about other people's happiness and memories of a happy childhood."

"You really want to hear?" He regarded her. How mature she looked then with that serious expression on her face, how changed from the almost hoydenish hilarity

that so often moved her. Fool, fool that he had been to let her slip into the keeping of namby-pamby Dan Roth! She never guessed what thoughts raced back of the man's glowing eyes as he looked into hers and began to describe some of the pictures of his memory.

"I have many happy memories and I want to share them with you. It is strange how the strains of an old song, the inflection of a voice, the shimmer of a bird's wings, the utterance of a word, lifts the veil of long years and you stand thrilled at the memory of other days. You look down the vista of the long road over which you have traveled, and though much of it is shrouded in darkness, there are many scenes that stand out in vivid relief.

"The phrase 'white violets' brings to your mental eyes a bed of them nestling in the grass. You see the children, yourself among them, crouching upon the earth to gather them, you feel the perfume in your nostrils, though you have not seen white violets in many years.

"Close to that picture is another of marvelous brightness, though the setting is twilight. The background is the favorite room in your childhood's home, the sitting-room, where in summer-time the robins' songs floated in through the open windows, where in winter days the fire burned brightest in the big stove. Now it is twilight, the day's play is over, the toys neatly piled into their corner, and bedtime is come. You climb into mother's lap as she sits in the big rocker, that old-fashioned rocker with the roses painted upon its back and the broad arms which make it comfortable for a little fellow to be held there. But you are not thinking of the roses as you climb into mother's lap. You want cuddling and loving and a song. But the mother hesitates—if she sings to you she knows you'll fall asleep and you are growing too heavy to carry

to bed. But you see leniency in her eyes and beg for one song, just one, while you promise to surely keep wide awake. So she gathers you close and sings your favorite. In after years you wonder why it was your favorite, that simple old song, 'Whiter Than Snow.' But as she sings it is unspeakably sweet. You look up into the face whose loveliness has been unmatched in all the years since and listen to each word as it falls from her lips until—the same old drowsiness creeps over you and you do not hear the ending. So the dear, tired mother carries you once more to bed and you do not feel the kiss she gives you before she carries away the light. A wonderful picture that! More worthy of preservation than any Old Master of fabulous price!

"There is another that has shadows in it, very vague in parts, fearfully realistic in others. You are ill, seriously ill, and you lie in the huge four-poster bed for many weary days and nights. You are so uncomfortable, you can't swallow, you can't lift your head for it throbs and burns. The days go slowly but the nights—how long they are! You toss and moan, you try to watch the shaded lamp on the high old bureau or trace the pictures on the old clock's glass doors, then you turn your face to the wall and try to sleep. But something is all wrong with your throat, your head is too hot—you utter a piteous moan. Then the mother, who had sat by your bed so long—it must be years according to your calculation—places her cool hand upon your forehead, rearranges your pillows and says gently, 'My poor lamb, go to sleep.' Presently, soothed by that touch, you do sleep. You waken often and always she is there to hush you to slumber again. As you look at that picture through memory's lifted veil you wonder how, after those long vigils for

you, you could ever wilfully grieve her and you sigh at your own unworthiness.

"Farther along the road is another picture, one painted in bright colors and splashes of sunshine. It is your first look at the great ocean. You feel so important as you take the trip with a kind, indulgent father. You had wondered on the train whether the ocean could be much bigger than your pond at home. When you see it you are staggered, speechless for a moment, then with childish loyalty to home you exclaim, 'Why, it slops up just like our pond!' You wonder why father laughs and later, when he repeats it to the home folks, you resent the merriment it provokes. That sea—how much bigger and bluer it is than you have ever seen it since! The big waves thrill you as they break on the shore in misty white foam; in your childish imagination you can look across it and see the country that lies beyond."

He sat dreamy-eyed, as though living once more those happy days of his childhood. Sarah broke into his retrospection.

"I hope you are properly thankful for such memories. But I know you are!" She veered suddenly from his pictures to her own, as though fearing to trust her own powers of control. "I want you to know that if I did miss what you had I'm happy now."

"Perfectly happy?"

"Well—I suppose such a thing as perfect happiness is not for mortals to know. But I'm almost in that state since I've found my people."

"I'm glad."

"Of course you are. And didn't you help me? It was you first made me perk up when I cried in the cherry tree. I have drawn part of that enormous circle already.

The girls are nice to me, even Mrs. Roth has buried the old hatchet ——”

Her face flushed at the remembrance of the incident in the Roth home, the burning of the check. But the man looked at her and misunderstood the flush. His heart sank a little lower. He prided himself upon his powers of deduction. Sarah and Dan did care for each other!

“Imagine!” went on the girl, “Mrs. Roth says now that she is glad I came to Fairview!”

“That is a conquest. I might as well tell you she told me you are the sweetest, finest girl in town.”

“Glory! I did drag her into that circle! With her on my side my ears won’t burn so often.” She threw back her head and laughed one of her gay, rippling laughs that had so thrilled him before. Often he had heard the merry sound come into his home and paused in his reading or writing to enjoy the fresh naturalness of it.

“Then you are happy now—well, I’m glad, more glad than I can tell you! If ever a mortal was meant for joy it is you!”

“Are not all mortals ‘born to trouble as the sparks fly upward’?” she asked.

“Yes. But I warrant you’d see something to be glad about no matter how much trouble came to you.”

“So I should. I think I’d never be down so low that I couldn’t look up.”

“Good! I hope your happiness will keep on growing. You deserve it. I wish I could make you perfectly happy, give you what you want ——”

“Oh, don’t!” She rose from her chair, the words of the marked sonnet burning into her brain. She turned her back to him and stood before the bookcase as if reading the titles. Something new and delightful pulsed

through her. What was it? That tingling rush in her fingers! Was it love? Why that precipitate withdrawing from his gaze? It seemed a long time she stood with her back to him, then she turned and walked back to her chair. He saw that some change had taken place, that she was lovelier than ever. Her eyes looked fearlessly into his as she said, "You see I came back."

"I knew you would. Why did you run away? What had I done?"

"You? Oh, you didn't do anything."

"But you ran from me as you ran from Dan last summer."

"No, oh, no! Not like that! That time I ran from Dan, this time from myself. Were you ever afraid of yourself, Mr. Preacher?"

"Many times."

She avoided his eyes as he spoke, but he could see the lambent fires of hers.

"Doesn't it beat the dickens, this growing up business!" She said it seriously yet she looked so bewildered that the man laughed. Then as she studied the back of the Stevenson book he looked at her. What a child she was and, paradoxical, what a woman! She would give with the generousness of a child, yet could withhold with the measuring of a woman. He closed his eyes a moment as though he stood before an unveiled sanctuary which he had no right to behold.

She brought him back to earth. "You told me of your memories of childhood, now let me tell you mine. Don't you think I haven't any!" Her expression told him she was trying to be flippant to suppress her pangs of regret for what she had missed.

"Let me hear about them," he urged.

"Well, once when I was about nine there was a big wedding in the fashionable church around on Fourth Street not very far from Red Rose Court. A whole gang of us went. Invited? No! We sneaked in, watched our chance and got through past the swells in stiff shirts. It was great! All the ladies in evening dress took my time. I was just a ragged youngster from Red Rose Court but I was shocked by the little they wore and got away with it. Since then I've seen worse and sometimes it makes me think of Kipling's Gunga Din. You remember :

" 'The uniform he wore
Was nothin' much before,
An' rather less than 'arf o' that be'ind.' "

He laughed heartily. "You are clever to think of that! But if those grand ladies who wear the evening gowns heard you I fancy they wouldn't relish having the creations compared to any 'twisty piece of rag.' "

"But that isn't the only glimpse I got into high society, please, sir. One night we were wandering about in one of the exclusive sections of the aristocrats when a dinner party was in progress. We boosted each other up at a side window to look into the dining-room. Say, there was enough silver on the table to perform an operation! And flowers! I thought at first somebody was dead! Just as I had my look-in a cop came along and we ran like rabbits. Bet he never had a chance to count how many there were of us. When I think of the harum-scarum piece of humanity I was I feel sorry for Miss Hughes. I'm everlastingly indebted to her. She's a darling, the best person I know, barring none."

"Rather hard on present company."

"Well, you might be almost as good."

"That's a concession. Thank you. I'll have to stretch my soul and try to rival that wonderful Miss Hughes."

"Well, I don't think you'll have to go so awful far to catch up, at any rate, to get within sight of her!"

They laughed together. Then she rose, the volume of Stevenson in her hand. "May I take this?"

"Help yourself. Read the chapter on El Dorado. There are many things in that I'm sure you'll like."

After she left the man sat with his books, but not reading any of them. The room seemed suddenly dim. He paraphrased Stevenson and thought her going from a room was as if all the candles had been extinguished.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CLOUDS ROLLED AWAY

AUNT SYBILLA had not forgotten the mysterious lending of Sarah's fifty dollars. The more she thought of it the more eager she became to solve the riddle. She was thinking about it two days before Christmas as she cleaned Sarah's room while the girl was at the store.

"Fifty dollars loaned away and she won't do it to tell to who! I don't like them sneaky ways. Mebbe, for all, she's goin' to give us trouble. That mom she had wasn't the right kind. Such badness comes out in the children, it got to, it just got to! Sarah said she got some pictures of Miss Hughes I'm to see once when I got time. Mebbe they are in her drawer. I'll look once."

She opened the bureau drawer. On the top of a stack of letters lay the paper Dan had written in preparation for the forgery.

"What in the world!" she snapped. "Pop's name wrote all over like some one was tryin' to do it like him! My goodness!" She opened and closed her mouth. "My goodness! Ach, she wouldn't do that! But what ——" She stared at the paper, her brain trying to solve the significance of it. Finally she came to the natural conclusion that Sarah had written the paper and for no other purpose than to use the grandfather's name for some illegal purpose. The woman's face hardened. She

decided to confront the girl with the incriminating paper and demand an explanation.

The first opportunity came at the dinner table. As soon as the four were seated there Aunt Sybilla produced the paper and held it to the girl. "Here, what does this mean?"

"What?" But she recognized the import of the interrogation.

"Ach, you know good enough what! I found it in your drawer when I looked in for them pictures you talked about."

"What is it?" asked Aunt Mary.

"Who wrote this?" demanded Jeremiah Burkhart as his daughter handed the paper to him. He looked to the girl for an answer, but she shook her head and her lips were hard as she told him she could not tell him that.

"Just what I thought!" Aunt Sybilla had the air of a prophet who sees his prophecies verified. "Who wrote that?" she asked Sarah. "I want to know who did."

"I can't tell you."

"Well," compromised the old man, "tell us if you did or somebody else."

"I can't tell you that much even." The agonizing bitterness of being suspected tempted her to divulge the real author of the paper, but something stronger than her temptation held her back. What would it profit her people to know and how much harm it might do the boy! She was convinced that Dan was trying his best to go straight, that he had learned his lesson and was keeping that promise to her. She couldn't expose him to stave off a bit of unpleasantness from herself. Her grandfather might discharge him, the news of the crime might be spread and the whole future of the foolish lad be jeopard-



"WHO WROTE THIS?"

ized because of that one fall which he so sincerely regretted.

"I can't tell you anything about it," she said with a tone of finality.

"Then I guess you done it yourself and was gettin' ready to forge checks on your grandpap!" pronounced Sybilla.

Her words brought a protest from the other aunt. "Sybilla, be careful! That ain't a little thing to say about abody!"

"Well, if she ain't guilty why can't she say so? Why does she act dumb for, like she didn't know who done it nor why? What do you do with your money, anyhow?" she demanded of the girl. "First you borrow out fifty dollars and can't tell who to, then you try to forge checks—what do you do with the money? Do you gamble it, or what?"

If the matter had not been so serious Sarah would have indulged in a gale of laughter at the utter ridiculousness of the question. But she was in no mood for laughter. She bit her lips to keep back the tears.

"Why can't you tell?" insisted the old grandfather, to whom the strange conduct of the girl was a painful experience. "I trust you and I felt so sure you would be a girl to do the right——"

"But look at her mom and her pop!" Sybilla reminded him.

Sarah sprang to her feet. "Aunt Sybilla, don't you dare talk like that about them! My mother never stole a penny in her life! For all her dancing she would never have taken the name of an innocent person and dragged it in the dirt! My mother was noble and she had a heart!"

Sobs were in her voice and an ominous moisture in her

eyes but she steadied her lips and went on, "I guess my father—well, he was my father, but he was also your brother! When it comes to throwing dirt I can sling a little as well as you can." She narrowed her eyes as she used to do long ago in Red Rose Court when she called some bully to account.

But Aunt Sybilla was not easily intimidated. "Well," she said curtly, "if you don't want people to think bad of you then don't be sneaky. What else can that paper mean but that you was tryin' to write like pop, and what for?"

Sarah could stand no more. She ran from the room, up-stairs to the white bed whose immaculate counterpane had so pleased her and there, with her face buried in its roses, she sobbed out her pain.

To be suspected, even in the face of circumstantial evidence, not to be trusted, hurt her more than anything had ever done before.

"They think I'm a thief, stealing from my own grandfather after I'm living in his house, earning money in his store—how can they think that? I'll never forget the shame of it! If they had struck me it would be less painful. To think me a thief ——"

"Sarah!" A gentle voice called her and a cool hand was placed on her hot head. Aunt Mary sat down beside the bed. "Come, Sarah, you mustn't mind how Sybilla talks. She's quick and says too much once in a while. Pop just said to us he don't think you would do anything like that. I told him I know you wouldn't."

"You don't think I'm a thief?" She turned her swollen face to the white-capped woman.

"Sarah, I know you are not! Just because things are mysteries don't say they must be bad."

Sarah sat up. "If I live to be a hundred I'll remember that you had faith in me when things looked black against me."

"Come down now and finish your dinner. It's too bad Sybilla didn't wait to make a fuss till you eat your snitz pie when you like them so! Come down and eat."

"I couldn't swallow a bite!"

"Now ain't that too bad of Sybilla? But you mustn't be too hard on her for she has so much trouble."

"Trouble! I'm thinking that Jake is mighty lucky she did turn him down!"

"Now, now! Sybilla's all right. She'd make Jake a good wife."

Sarah refrained from further expression of her opinion just then for she knew it would hurt the gentle woman who had borne heavy burdens cheerfully and yet saw excuse for those who sank under theirs.

When she returned to work her reddened eyes surprised Dan.

"What's wrong? Anything I can help?" He was considerate and gentlemanly in his attitude to her since that day of her magnanimous action to him; his whole bearing in her presence spelled gratitude and a determination to prove worthy of her kindness.

"No, Dan, nothing you can help."

"Ah, that's rotten! I wish I could do something to show how much I appreciate ——"

She held up a silencing finger. "Then don't talk about it, please. That's the best way to show me." She smiled at him and bent over her work and he could not guess how heavy was the heart she bore. All through the long afternoon, with its press of work, the thought haunted her—they think I'm a criminal! Like claps of thunder

the dire words rang in her ears so that her hands trembled and tears blurred the pages she was trying to fill. Her tortured brain was trying to look into the future—how could she live through years of mistrust? Would she ever be happy again? Would she had never found her people if they had no faith in her. Miss Hughes would have understood. She would have trusted and said, "Dear child, it looks bad on the surface but I'll trust you until you can explain the clouds away." But then Miss Hughes was like that, so understanding, so broad-minded she could see the good in people though they were covered with the very slime of sin. One thing she would remember, Aunt Mary was like Miss Hughes.

When supper-time came Sarah rose reluctantly. She would rather have faced a company of ferocious animals than submit to another tirade from Aunt Sybilla. But Aunt Mary had evidently implored the sister to refrain from further questioning, for the evening meal brought no renewal of the dreaded subject. Aunt Mary talked and smiled, grandfather hid valiantly his uncertainty about the girl and Aunt Sybilla sat silent and grim. Sarah felt the iron about her neck growing heavier each minute. A life like that would soon be intolerable, or did one become accustomed to it in time and accept it with apathy or stoicism?

She went to her room early that night, pleading a few last gifts to be tied up in festive ribbons. As she went she thought of the farcical task of tying gifts, adding gay cards with gay messages when her heart was so heavy. Tears fell on the white tissue paper until the blistered surface told her it would never do. She sat for a long time and thought over the matter. Would it have been better to shield herself and let Dan look out for himself?

He had been headed for destruction; she had turned him to a better path, and this was what she got for it! She was a fool to meddle with his affairs! Did it pay to do good? She laughed a cynical laugh as she thought of the old saying that virtue is its own reward—some reward she was getting out of it! For the first time in her life the child who had come from Red Rose Court and Sunset Mountain to live in Fairview cried herself to sleep. She thought of her first Christmas at home, her dreams about it, her plans, and it was all dead sea fruit, ashes and dust, bitter gall.

When she woke her misery was still with her. She lay wide-eyed, thinking, thinking! If she could stop her brain from whirling and her heart from aching! In her extremity she thought of the rector next door and wondered dully whether he would trust her if he knew. How she wished she could fly to him for comfort. Was it just two nights ago they had joked about her seeking consolation in the rectory?—it seemed like æons ago. She had said so glibly to him that she would never be down so low that she couldn't look up—what an easy assertion to make, a harder one to carry out!

At breakfast Aunt Sybilla did not allude to the matter, but her manner, her very silence, spoke eloquently that she still remembered it and wanted to know the truth.

However, when noon came and they were seated about the table her desire to fathom the mystery was too strong to permit silence.

"Sarah, ain't you ready to tell yet about that paper?" she asked.

"No!"

"Well, I won't rest in my grave till I know if you

wrote it and if you was goin' to forge your grandpap's name."

In her excitement her voice became shrill and every word fell distinctly upon the ears of Mrs. Roth, who had come round the back way and stood at the kitchen door ready to enter as the words fell. That woman's first impulse was to run and never let the people of the house know she overheard. She knew what the words meant. In some manner Sybilla had heard of the check and suspected Sarah. Mother-desire to protect her offspring urged her to keep silent and allow the stigma to settle upon the innocent. In a flash that seared her very heart she saw the scene of that night when Sarah had confronted Dan with the evidence of his guilt. She felt again the terror and hopelessness as the disgrace of her boy loomed before her. Could she forget the moment Sarah walked to the fire and threw the forgery into the flames? In that moment Mrs. Roth reached the heights; the multitude of her sins were covered by one act of real charity. She turned and ran across the street to her own home, where Dan was reading the paper during the brief recess of the noon hour.

"Dan." She told the story in a breathless jumble of words.

He, too, proved that contact with Sarah had been a saving experience. He rose. "They blame Sarah for my guilt! She's an angel! I'm going straight over!"

A few minutes later the Burkhart family gasped simultaneously at the apparition that appeared in the doorway of the kitchen: Mrs. Roth, panting, weeping; Dan, hatless and bursting with some information.

"I heard you ——" the mother began.

Dan stepped out and said, "Mother, let me tell it!

Mother heard something makes her think you found a paper with Jeremiah Burkhart written all over it."

"Yes. I did!" Sybilla wasn't loath to admit.

"And you suppose that because Sarah had it she wrote it?"

"She won't tell."

"No, she can't tell, because she'd expose the real sinner! I wrote that paper!"

Sarah made a protesting sound but he paid no attention to it.

"I wrote it and she found it and thought I needed watching. So when I forged a check and she got it she saw just what it was. She came over and told us about it. I'll never forget the hell I went through that night. I saw what I had done, how I was started on the down road. But that blessed girl burned the check after she had given me a good scare and because we had spent our money so close we had no fifty to make it good, she gave me hers to make it good until after the holidays, when I can pay her back. It isn't easy to tell you this. I was hoping it could be kept in the dark, but I couldn't see her blamed for anything like that. It's a wretched story so far as I am concerned but it puts a halo round her head. Mr. Burkhart, I'm sorry. I don't suppose you can trust me after this ——"

"My boy!" cried the mother. "Oh, Mr. Burkhart, don't be too hard on him! He's trying so hard to go right now. I know he learned his lesson. Don't send him to jail or discharge him—say you won't!"

The old man spoke with irritating slowness to the ones who hung upon his words as though much depended upon them. "I guess mebbe Dan got enough punishment for it a'ready. If this had happened before Sarah come to

live with us I'd been for puttin' him to jail or anyhow to discharge him, but"—his voice trembled—"she learned me to be merciful and forgive, and I guess we'll call it all in the past so long as Dan goes right."

Mrs. Roth was overjoyed. "Sarah, I want to tell you how mean I talked about you and all and how sorry I am. And what I said about Reverend Snavelly making up to girls and then going off wasn't true. I was so mean I didn't want you to get a good man, but now I think the best one in the world won't be too good for you."

After Dan and his mother left, a happy pair once more, Aunt Sybilla came to Sarah. "Say," she said humbly, "I ain't fit to wipe off your shoes after all I said to you, but if you don't hold it against me I want to be nice to you from now on."

"Aunt Sybilla, of course you didn't know! It was natural to suspect me." The girl smiled through tears and before they knew it her arms were twined around the neck of the old aunt. "I believe," she said, "that I'm going to like you every bit as much now as I like Aunt Mary!"

"Well, I guess it's time once I treat you nice!"

"Now we're going to have a happy Christmas, after all!" Sarah clapped her hands. "And this morning I thought it would be the worst one ever I knew. It just shows that we shouldn't worry so, that things turn out better than we expect and people are so much nicer than we think they are. Here's Dan going to make me proud of him, and his mother nice to me, and you all so kind to me—oh, I'd like to run up and down the street and shout hurrah!"

CHAPTER XXII

CHRISTMAS EVE

CHRISTMAS EVE Sarah declared she was so happy she felt tempted to stay awake all night to see Christmas ushered in. At the remark her aunts exchanged glances which the girl would have noted if she had been less occupied with singing pæans of gladness. Every time she left the room the women spoke in hurried whispers that ran this wise—"Are you sure he'll bring it to-night?" "Yes, he said he'd come after the store closes and not make any noise but put it on the porch—sh! here she comes!"

Sarah, not knowing that strange doings were brewing in the old house, asked why they sewed so long on Christmas Eve. "I declare, to see you, Aunt Sybilla, one would never think you had twenty aprons in your chest! You sew on that one as though you had to wear it to-morrow!"

"But I want to give it to Mrs. Felker with her cookies, for she's so good to that poor crazy boy and I think still abody can't be too glad when you ain't got one like him."

Sarah accepted the explanation and the aunts sewed on. At ten grandfather went to bed, but the women made no move toward "fixing things for the night."

Finally the girl said, "I'm going to bed. I'm tired; it's been a full day but a happy one. I couldn't hold another ounce of joy."

As soon as she was safely up-stairs the sewing was

thrown aside and strange doings began in the Burkhart sitting-room. The women brought out from under the haircloth sofa several boxes and opened them. Stifled exclamations were heard as colored balls for a tree were held up. Then the door was opened cautiously, a tree dragged into the room and Aunt Mary whispered, "He had no stand left but he said to put it in a bucket of coal would hold it up."

They followed directions, stood off to look at the tree, then set to work with the trimming. It was a new task for the Mennonite women but love guided their hands. Their niece, the wonderful girl who had done so much for them, showed them how to forgive, taught them how to be loyal, lighted their drab lives and set the house ringing with her music—their child had never had a tree of her own, she wanted one and she was going to have one!

When the last red ball had been hooked on a branch they stood away and viewed their work. "Um," said Aunt Sybilla, "ain't so bad for two old maids!"

"Yes. Won't she jump?"

Then they turned out the lights and went up-stairs. Sarah called to them, "Gracious, did you make a whole dress for Mrs. Felker? I just woke up and had a notion to come down and see if anything is wrong, then I heard you come up."

The women smiled at the narrow escape and bit their lips like children fearful of discovery in some fault. Their good-nights to the girl were full of love, but given between mysterious chuckles.

When the aunts reached the room they had shared since girlhood and closed the door Aunt Mary said, "Sybilla, it don't right suit me to just give her sensible things. Of course the petticoat you got and the woolen

dress I bought are nice, but ain't they a little—ach, you know, they don't seem like Christmas!"

"I know what you mean. Guess we might have bought her a little perfume or something like that." Perfume was the one frivolous desire in the heart of Sybilla.

"Now I know what!" Aunt Mary had an inspiration. "Why not give her that jewelry we had long a'ready? Them breastpins."

"We might. We're plain and don't wear them anyhow. She likes to be fixed up, for Mary Becker is, and they go together. Let's look once."

So the white-capped women bent over an old velvet jewel box and took from it an antique cameo and a pearl-studded pin, relics of past generations.

"They're good, and I seen a lady with one of them picture pins on not so long ago. I guess they are in style again. Here, I'll put them in this little box and slip down and put it with her other presents."

CHAPTER XXIII

CHRISTMAS MORNING

HOME—there is a magic about the word that will not be denied. Christmas at home—thrice magical words that fling aside the mists of vanished years and bring, even to hardened hearts, memories of childhood days and Christmas at home.

To Sarah the words were fraught with wonder. She wakened early, heard the aunts prowling about in their room, and sprang from her high old-fashioned bed. As she dressed she called gaily "Merry Christmas!" first down the hall to her grandfather, then up the other direction to her aunts.

"Don't you go down-stairs till we do," commanded Aunt Sybilla.

"Why not?"

"Well, just you do like I tell you!"

"All right. I'll be good, seeing it's Christmas."

So when the women and Grandfather Burkhart were ready to go down they found the girl sitting meekly at the head of the stairs.

"Did you ever see such a good child?" she asked roguishly. "But I'm only being good so I'll get some presents."

"You better! Pop, you go down first."

The family procession moved slowly, too slowly for the eager girl, who would have slid down the bannister if the coast had been clear.

Grandfather led the way into the sitting-room. Sarah was so excited she did not see the tree at once. Something in the expectant smiles of the women aroused her suspicions; she followed her grandfather's glance —

“Oh, sweet Peter! A tree!”

She ran to it and touched the lowest shining balls, then turned and faced her family. “You’re the dearest people on earth! I couldn’t be any happier if I had a million dollars left to me! When did you do it? How did you get it fixed without me knowing? I’m not as smart as I thought I was!”

Sybilla laughed. “Mary ordered it and bought the balls when she went up-town last evening. It was on the side porch till you went to bed. We had a time trimmin’ it to suit, but we done pretty good, ain’t?”

“Chased me to bed,” said grandfather. “They thought you’d smell the rat if I stayed up late too. You done pretty good for the first tree, girls.”

“Their first tree too?” asked the girl. When they told her it was, she exclaimed, “Then we’ll all enjoy our first tree together.”

A little later they gathered for morning worship. Sarah found the place in the huge family Bible and grandfather read the Christmas message. She looked across at Aunt Sybilla. The lined face was softened. Sarah felt a tug at her heart. How much better she understood and liked the woman now! She hoped they would become capital friends since Aunt Sybilla had been drawn into the magic circle.

“Now it’s time to give out the presents,” came Aunt Mary’s announcement. Sarah ran up the stairs and brought down the candy, perfume and gilt-framed picture. She dimpled as she saw the smiles of pleased sur-

prise on the faces of the family. Her white-hyacinth gifts were very welcome.

Then came her turn to open packages. The dress, petticoat and money from grandfather pleased her, but it was the last little box with the precious jewelry in it that brought from her the greatest cries of delight.

"For me? These for me?"

"Be sure."

"To keep?"

"Yes, abody generally dare keep presents. The pearl pin belonged to your great granny and the picture one your granny wore when she was a girl."

"Oh, to think that I have a real grandmother's jewelry, and a great-grandmother's too! I'll sit up all night to watch these pins!"

It was only after Aunt Sybilla's repeated warnings that the turkey had to be placed in the oven early and breakfast prepared that the girl laid her presents on a table and went to the kitchen. As she helped with the work she broke into singing. Nothing seemed adequate to express her feeling but the carol, "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear." Aunt Sybilla, placing the turkey into the roaster, paused a moment as she heard the words, "Oh, rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing!" Had her ears been stopped these many years? It had taken the hand of the girl to tear from her the grave clothes that bound her and to show her how to forgive and understand and love her fellow mortals. She thought of recent Christmas days in their home, the dull quiet time, a few useful gifts, a little rest or nodding over a paper. But this year with the girl's laughter sounding through the house like the peal of bells, her spontaneous joy in her gifts—what a day it was! Then she thought of Jake.

The thought was disturbing. Where was he spending his Christmas? Had she been too hard on him? She wished she could tell him she forgave him—not that she wanted to speak to him or have him come—oh, no! But just to know that everything was right between them would be a blessing. She shook her head. Never, never, could she make the first move to reconciliation, never!

After breakfast Sarah donned red cap, mittens and sweater and went out to sweep the light snow that had fallen during the night. Her dark hair escaped from under her cap and before she had swept many minutes her cheeks matched her sweater and cap. There was a sharp tang in the air, a clear cold that moved one to walk briskly at the same time it filled you with appreciation of the perfection of the winter day.

“Merry Christmas!” called the rector from his side of the hedge, where he, too, was exercising with a broom.

“Merry Christmas!” came the gay reply as she waved her broom in friendly greeting. “Isn’t this great!”

“I think so. You like to do it?”

“I’d sweep all Fairview if I could!”

“Off the map?”

“No, no! Certainly not! Rather on the map in big capitals! It’s the finest, dearest place I ever struck.”

“With the finest people?”

“Um—yes, some of them.” Then she laughed and the heart of the rector fluttered like a captive bird as he met the flash of it and saw the light dancing in her gray eyes.

Just then Sarah reached the walk that ran round the side of the house and permitted a view of the home across the street.

“Hello, Dan!” she called. “Merry Christmas!”

The rector’s heart fluttered with another emotion. Lit-

tle demons of jealousy pranced about in him. He was finding how easy it is to break the tenth commandment.

Dan returned a merry call and went down the street.

"Dan's a nice boy," the rector's curiosity began like the investigating antennæ of a butterfly.

"Yes," responded the girl so fervently that the man did not gain much comfort from his probing. "Isn't it strange how you can change in feeling for some people? When I first came here I detested Dan Roth, but now—well, I think he is going to be a man we can be proud of."

The rector gave his broom a far more vigorous swing than was necessary to move the light snow, but said no more as the girl moved farther to the front of the house and away from him. He thought of her words as he went on sweeping the snow. Of course Dan would come over with a gift for Sarah later—lucky Dan!

His supposition proved true. Later in the morning Dan ran across the street with cookies his mother sent and a box of candy for Sarah. His eyes pleaded with the girl to accept his offering, his thank offering for her goodness to him. She responded royally. There was no coquettishness in her manner neither any lover-like attitude in his, just a frank friendliness.

But the rector, who had seen the youth enter the Burkhardt home, pictured to himself a far different meeting. He pulled himself up short—"time to halt," he admonished his heart. Later when he joined the family of one of his parishioners at Christmas dinner and found himself in the company of two eligible daughters he remembered what was expected of him as a guest and tried to be entertaining and not a bore, but the vision of a red-clad girl with laughing face thrust itself before him until he felt relieved when the dinner was over and the time

came when he could take his departure. He supposed Burkharts also had a dinner guest. Lucky Dan!

Burkharts did have a dinner guest but it was not Dan. The identity of that guest would have surprised Fairview if the news had spread. It was not Dan, but Dan was responsible for the invitation. In the morning the boy had admired the tree and remarked thoughtfully, "Say, why didn't you put an angel on the top, Aunt Sybilla? Don't you know that every Christmas tree must have an angel on the very tip-top?"

"No, ain't that too bad! But me nor Mary never trimmed none before and didn't know that." After he left she racked her brains to think where she could secure an angel—did she have any in the house? An inspiration came to her. She went to the attic, brought from under the rafters a box and stirred about until she found an old-fashioned valentine. It was a huge heart, covered with lace, and had pasted upon it a figure she called an angel. It was none other than the Little Blind God, but to her it had always been an angel. She lifted it from the lace heart and carried it down-stairs. When they fixed a tree once in their lives they wanted to have it right! She fastened the cupid to the very top and called Sarah.

"Where did you get it?"

"Up in the garret."

"Looks like part of a valentine."

"It is. Ach, Jake sent it to me once when we went to school yet."

"Aunt Sybilla!" The girl had a sudden inspiration. "Why don't you invite Jake here for dinner to-day?"

"Here! To-day! For dinner! Well, I guess not!"

"Why not? Isn't it Christmas and don't you feel

sorry for him, and isn't this the day to meet old friends and make up with them and be nice to them?"

"Mebbe it is, but Jake—why he—ach, he wouldn't come if I would ask it."

"Yes he would. I know him. He often comes to the store and asks about the family."

"Not me!" She raised a hand in protest.

"Yes, you! He asks if you are well and—but I won't tell you another thing! If you want to know how nice Jake is you better ask him to come for dinner. I'll call him up and invite him—may I?"

"No—wait once—mebbe it would be nice—well, I don't care if you don't tell him I said so ——"

"I may? Good!" Sarah ran to the telephone. By the time she had secured the number the woman realized what was happening.

"Stop! Sarah!" She laid a heavy hand on the girl's arm, but it was shaken off.

"You're too late. You said I might." And she spoke into the instrument the words that brought a promise from the farmer several miles away. He would be glad to eat his Christmas dinner in the Burkhart home.

"My, what did you do that for?" Sybilla demanded, trembling, as the girl faced her and smiled triumphantly.

"I don't know, but I think I'm just a willing instrument in the hand of fate," she said as she followed the perturbed woman to the kitchen, where the savory odor of turkey was already foretelling one of the good things that waited for the visitor.

Aunt Mary received the news with a little relieved laugh. "Sybilla, I'm glad. I used to wish poor Jake could come for dinner, for he always liked our cookin' so."

Jeremiah Burkhart said little but he nodded his head as Sarah ran to him with the news. It meant that Sybilla was learning to forgive. He liked Jake, he always did like Jake.

Sybilla's heart beat too fast as the time approached for the coming of Jake. She made unnecessary trips to the cellar and trotted back and forth in the kitchen until Mary felt tempted to tell her to go sit down. But she understood how agitated her sister must be and bore with her.

"What ailed me?" the elder sister said over and over to Sarah. "What in the world made me say you dare ask him? But you might knowed I didn't mean it! If only you'd listened when I said you should not do it! But you went on and asked him and now he's comin'!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GUEST

WHEN Jake came it was very simple after all. Sarah opened the door for him and stood in the hall with him as he shook the snow from his overshoes, then she led the way into the sitting-room where the man of the house greeted him as if he had been a weekly visitor. Then Mary came in from the kitchen, followed by Sybilla wiping her hands on her apron.

"Well, Jake," she addressed him.

"Well, Sybilla," he said in his slow, gentle way, with a rising inflection on the last syllable of her name. They shook hands and then Sarah stepped into the silence and made some trivial remark that set Mary and the grandfather talking and left the two estranged to make their peace.

"You give me a mighty fine Christmas present, Sybilla. When the girl here called up I could hardly believe it at first. Then it come to me that you thought we was old enough to get some sense and not have hard feelin's no more. It seems good to make up, don't it, Sybilla?"

"Yes. It worried me a lot to think that I felt so hard to you but when Sarah come and learned us that we ain't Christians like we think we are if we don't forgive people then it set me thinkin'. I guess I was too much like a stone. I felt long a'ready that we ought to talk together. I'm glad you come and you dare stop in sometimes like you used for dinner or supper."

"And is that all?" Jake looked at her over his steel-rimmed spectacles. His fifty years of life had mellowed him and made him a kindly man, but they had also taught him to read human nature with a fair degree of accuracy. He knew he would have to assert himself to gain any inroad into the heart of Sybilla. She would hold him at arm's length if he were too slow.

"Why, ach, Jake, I guess I didn't get you in here to make up that old—to be promised like we used—I just wanted to do the right thing by you and not feel we don't talk together."

"Yes? Well, I'm a pretty good waiter. I waited twenty years for you to forget that one slip I made, and I guess I can wait a little longer for you to make up right. Say, that turkey smells mighty good! There ain't anybody can beat you and Mary cookin'."

"Go on, now, Jake," Sybilla smiled at him. "You talk to pop a while and I'll go out help with the dinner."

She bustled away and as she entered the kitchen where Sarah was working the girl looked at her in amazement. Did the coming of Jake make the grim old woman like that? Why, her face was shining, years seemed to have rolled off her shoulders, a light shone in her eyes—Sarah wanted to run to her and say some of the tender things she had never wanted to say before.

The Christmas dinners on Sunset Mountain had seemed veritable feasts to the children and Sarah had thought nothing could ever be finer than they, but the dinner she ate in her home with Sybilla and Jake looking at each other as though their youth had come back to stay, Mary beaming in her sweet way, glad because others were happy, grandpap contentedly eating and talking and joking about the wish-bone and reminding Sybilla of the time

she climbed on a chair to put one over the door when she knew Jake was coming, and Sybilla blushing at the reminder, and Jake chuckling and grandpap laughing at his own joke—that was a *real* dinner! It was small wonder the girl swallowed pure joy with every mouthful of the meal.

There was a touch of pathos in it also. During the conversation Mary asked Jake what they were having for dinner at home and brought the laughing answer, "Nothing like this! My sister went to Mount Joy and she boiled me some ham for cold and I was going to cook potatoes and she did fix me some cranberry sauce and get dried corn out."

"Jake, you would have eat all alone out there?"

"Ach, I done that often a'ready. She likes to go way holidays and it don't do to tie her down too close. I can shift pretty good alone but of course this is better tasin'!"

"But alone on Christmas!" Sybilla was distressed.

"Yes, but you fixed it for me that I got here. See the fine old-fashioned dinner I got and now we're friends again and—Sarah, I promise you that when you get married I'll buy you the best 'haustire' (wedding gift) in Lancaster County!"

Jake stayed late into the afternoon. There were so many threads of other days to pick up that when he looked at his big silver watch he whistled, "Whew! How time flies without us chasin' it! I got to get home and feed. Can't starve the chickens and things on Christmas."

Before he left he shocked Sybilla by holding her hand with a vise-like grasp which she knew would be futile to loose.

"Say, Sybilla, I guess that engagement was never broke, now was it?"

"Why, yes."

"Oh, no! Not my part of it. They say still it takes two to make a bargain and I think it ought to take two to break one. If you don't mind my bein' a little sloppy and spillin' things on the floor or havin' mud on my shoes sometimes, when you are so particular, why I guess, mebbe, for all, you and me might get hitched up yet."

"Jake—I don't know. I don't believe ——"

"Ach," he laughed. "You just think about it once. Mebbe when I come again you change your mind. I'm comin' in soon."

"You dare come, but ——"

"Now, no buts, them belong in your pop's store." He laughed at his own pun and even Sybilla understood it and smiled. "Jake, you ain't different from twenty years back," she told him.

"Yes I am. I'm nicer but you got to marry me to find out how nice I'd be to you. Well, thanks for my dinner. It was like old times."

After he left Sybilla had many things to ponder about. Could they travel back again to the days of their youth? No, but they could find happiness regardless of their age, if they understood and loved each other and were ready to bear and forbear.

How foolish Jake talked, thought the woman; why would they want to marry when they were almost fifty? Of course, she would never, never do such a thing! Of course not! How nice Jake was, just as nice as ever, more so! She liked to have him around and she'd just make that farm of his the best home ever he had! The idea of that sister of his going off and leaving poor Jake

alone for dinner on that day! Poor Jake! If she married him—but she wasn't going to marry him! That was settled. Yet she bet he wasn't sloppy like he said and if he did drag mud into the house a woman didn't mind cleaning up after her man when she liked him. She was glad she and he had made up, but of course she wouldn't think of marrying him!

Which showed that Sybilla was woman to the core and that Jake stood a very good chance of gaining her for his wife.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CIRCLE COMPLETE

CHRISTMAS night and the stars shone as they must have done that night when Christmas was young. Sarah felt the lure of them as she stepped to the street after services in St. Paul's. She walked with a happy crowd of young people, now accepted as one of them, until one by one they dropped off at their own doors and she was left to finish the last half block alone to her house. But the night was so bright and the stars and the still sky called, so she went past the Burkhart gate and kept on walking.

It had been a day long to be remembered. Where would she find another so brimful of happiness, so running over with glad happenings? First the tree and the loving thought of the aunts who had trimmed it for her, then the friendly call of Dan and its satisfaction, the coming of Jake and the weaving of a romance in her romantic Irish heart, then the service in the church when the children sang and everybody seemed to spill the spirit of the day. Now for a walk under the stars, then to go in and sit a while with her family, and later to creep under the patchwork quilt which the indefatigable fingers of the aunts had pieced, to pull it close to her chin and sink into quiet sleep or happy dreams.

The town clock struck nine and Sarah felt like shouting, "All's well!"

However, she went silently down the street, the snow crunching under her tread, her hands in the pockets of her coat, her thoughts up among the clouds. Then suddenly they came to earth again. It was strange, she thought, the rector had never come over to see her tree though she had told him about it and invited him to come. Well, if he didn't choose to be friendly she wouldn't care! But what had he meant when he wrote those words under the sonnet and laid her cardinal flower there? If he had meant ——

"Pig!" she cried to herself. "You got the earth with a fence around it, now you want the moon!"

As she mused some one called her name and hurrying steps sounded behind her. She turned and saw the Reverend James Snavelly trying to reach her.

He breathed pantingly. "You are a walker! I saw you leave the girls and keep on past the house. May I come with you? Are you going for a walk?"

"How in the wide world shall I answer all those questions? Yes, yes, I'm going for a walk and you may come. I think it's too fine a night to go in so early. I started to go round the block. I can do it in fifteen minutes."

"Please don't. I have several things to ask you. I didn't get over to see that tree but I'm coming to-morrow—please don't go so fast or we'll be back before I ask what I must ask to-night."

She slackened her pace, but kept silent. Her heart began strange antics—what was he going to ask her?

"Sarah, if a man came to you and offered his love would he be too late?"

Now she knew!

"Why ——" She knitted her forehead, then laughed.

"That's a personal question, but because you're my neighbor and have been nice to me, I'll answer it. If a man came to me and offered me his love, would he be too late?" She thought over it as a small boy might consider a puzzling mental problem in school. "No, I'd say he were in very good time if he were the right man."

"Sarah! Look at me; am I the right one? I love you, I want you!"

"You—do you remember what, who I am? My father, myself ——"

"Sweetheart, as if that mattered! All that counts is whether we love each other. I'm eternally sure about my part of it; what I want to know is whether you can care for me."

"Then I'll tell you—I'm loving you as only an Irish-Dutch girl can! Don't you kiss me on the street!" she said as his arm went around her and he bent over her face.

"I will!" he whispered, and did so, but the street was deserted and none of the town gossips were there to see.

"Jimmie," she said as she straightened her hat, "that's dreadful! To kiss me on the street!"

"Then don't smile at me like that or I'll have to do it again."

"Tell me," she asked, "what made you think you care for me?"

"Think? Know!" he corrected.

"Know," she repeated obediently. "Tell me."

"Oh, Sarah, I've been tortured these few weeks. I saw Dan Roth kiss your hand one night over in their house and his mother smiling at you both, then she sang your praises so loudly, and I concluded you and Dan were engaged."

"Dan and I!" The girl's laugh rang out. "Why, that couldn't ever be! If you listened to town gossip you'd know that he and Mary Becker are crazy about each other. That kiss he gave me was just for some little service I was able to do for him."

"Glory! And I thought, I jumped to conclusions ——"

"A very foolish thing to do and rather dangerous," she told him. "But if you thought that, what made you hurry after me to-night? Did you think you'd try to steal me from Dan?"

"No. To-night after service I saw Dan take Mary's arm and the two go off alone and you join the girls. I wanted to shout, for I knew that if you and Dan were engaged you'd be going off with him. So I came away as fast as I could to make a grab for you before some other chap really could get you."

"None could, Jimmie. It's you I want."

As they neared the Burkhart home she grew serious. "Dear," she said, "how much happiness can one human being hold? I thought I had all I could manage. Such a Christmas I never dreamed of, and now you give me more ——"

"Your heart is big enough for oceans of it. Sarah, I'm thinking it can hold as much as you give to others, and measuring by what you are giving me when you say you love me and will marry me, you'll keep on adding more and more."

"Jimmie! At last the circle is complete! I got inside more than I ever dreamed, for I have you. Of course I liked you and wanted to be friends but I imagined you were about as accessible as the stars so far as I was concerned. So I just dreamed about you and wished and

longed and hoped a little and didn't I get the very thing I wanted but didn't dare tell even myself I wanted!"

"I'm yours, Sarah. You read me right that first day—I didn't want to be drawn into that circle, now I'd rather die than be shut out of it! I was attracted to you then in spite of myself. I love you because I must love you. Unconsciously everything you said became fixed in my memory. I could tell you all about the little Maloney baby you held in your arms as you sat on the curb of Red Rose Court—my Madonna of the Curb. A little mother, trying to relieve suffering even then—a Madonna of the Curb."

"Jimmie, when you talk to me like that I want to cry."

"You told me once you'd rather laugh, for it keeps you better looking."

"Gracious, are you going to remind me of all the foolish things I ever said?"

"No," he promised, "but I have many things to say to you."

"Well, to-morrow is a holiday, Second Christmas, and I won't have to work. You might find time to jump across the hedge, perhaps."

"I might!" His voice was eloquent of the promise of love.

She let her hand linger in his as they stood by the Burkhart gate. "I, too, have many things to say. You know, when I was on the mountain and things made me happy, so happy that they hurt, things like the sunset or birds or Miss Hughes' kindness, I used to think my mother knew about it and was glad. I feel that way now and I'm thinking she's so glad for me this minute that heaven can hardly hold her!"

He stooped then and kissed her on the forehead,

"What a heart of gold!" he whispered. "Good-night, sleep sweet," he said as he opened the gate for her.

"Sleep! I'll not sleep this night but sit up and tell myself you love me! And I have a wake to go to, too."

"Who's dead?" he asked, falling into her mood.

"My fears, troubles, unhappiness—all deader'n a door-nail, and you did it!"

"Which is, I am sure, the finest, wisest bit of work I have ever done."

At last she had found the happy balance of womanhood, her feet tethered to earth, her soul winging among the heights. At last the little child of the slums and reformatory had come into her own,—the circle was complete!

THE END

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